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MARTIN BUBER THE MAN AND HIS THOUGHT

Ruth Birnbaum

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Steven S. Schwarzschild

MOSES AND THE CULTS

Tikva Frymer-Kensky

THE JEWISH PHILOSOPHER IN SEARCH OF A ROLE

Neil Gillman

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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

In increasing measure, modern men are turning again to the quest for a worldview on the issues that are timeless—the meaning of life, the challenge of death, the purpose of suffering, the significance of the individual, his relation to society, and the goal of history. In order to advance this enterprise of spiritual discovery of our time this Journal has been projected. It will be primarily concerned with the philosophy, ethics, and religion of Judaism as a factor in the contemporary world . . .

We are committed to the proposition that Judaism has positive value today for Jews and for the world . . . At the same time, we disassociate ourselves from the dangerous tendency toward the hardening of party lines on the contemporary Jewish scene . . . The members of the Board of Editors belong to every school of Jewish life or to none. The trends popularly referred to as Orthodox, Conservatism, Reform, Reconstructionism, as well as others that as yet have no specific names, have their advocates among us, though no institution or movement is officially represented . . . Undoubtedly, our differences will find expression in these pages, but we shall be at one in opposing the dogmatism which takes for granted that one's own particular standpoint has a monopoly on truth and the authoritarianism which would suppress any contrary point of view.

Judaism will be dedicated to the quest for truth in the spirit of freedom. Our columns will be open to anyone who has something significant to say and the ability to say it well. New and unconventional interpretations, whatever their standpoint, will be welcomed from every source, for we share the conviction of the Talmud that "Both these and the others are the words of the living God." *From the introductory article by Robert Gordis, "Toward a Renaissance of Judaism" in Vol. I, No. 1.*

The First Reader

On Buber's 20th Yahrzeit

While an important cultural figure is alive and active he tends to dominate the intellectual landscape of his time, but shortly after his death, when his physical presence is no longer felt, his influence seems to diminish substantially. Only after the passage of time does a more balanced evaluation of his life and work emerge and he assumes his rightful position in history.

Without doubt, Martin Buber was one of the seminal figures in religious and philosophical thought during the first half of the twentieth century. Only slightly less important was his impact on modern Judaism and Zionist ideology. After his death in 1960 he seemed to have undergone an eclipse, but this was an illusion. Both the man and his work continue to exercise a powerful fascination on the life and thought of our age.

The Spring 1978 issue of JUDAISM was devoted almost in its entirety to a symposium entitled, "Martin Buber on His Centennial-A Tribute and An Evaluation." The twentieth anniversary of his passing is being marked by JUDAISM in the form of a new symposium entitled "Martin Buber, the Man and his Thought," which, we believe, will enhance the understanding and appreciation of this significant thinker and teacher.

The illustrious medieval Hebrew poet, Judah Halevi, was also the greatest anti-rationalist Jewish philosopher of the Middle Ages. Buber was the most distinguished foe of modern rationalism in philosophy and theology in his own time. In spite of the elements they shared in common, there were vast differences between them.

In her paper, "Judah Halevi and Martin Buber on the Radicalization of Judaism," *Ruth Birnbaum* compares these two great figures in Jewish

thought, highlighting the similarities as well as the differences between them.

All of his life, Buber found his major source of Jewish inspiration in the bible. Together with Franz Rosenzweig he created an extraordinary translation of it into German, which has blazed a trail for many translators into other languages who have followed in their footsteps. Moses and the Prophets were the subjects of important works from his pen. In his paper, "The Psychobiography of a Dialogue: Buber and the Biblical Abraham," *Henry Abramovitch* calls attention to Buber's involvement with the figure of the biblical Patriarch with whom Jewish history began.

It has long been noted that Buber received a far more enthusiastic reception in Christian religious and philosophical circles than in Judaism, and the phenomenon deserves further analysis. In any event, Buber's magisterial role in contemporary religion cannot be gainsaid. It is the subject of *Maurice Friedman's* paper, "Martin Buber's Influence on Twentieth Century Religious Thought."

In the closing paper in the symposium, *Steven S. Schwarzschild* presents a detailed critical review of Maurice Friedman's three volume work on the life of Buber under the title, "Buber And His Biographer."

We Do Not Worship the Leader

One of the most striking phenomena of our time is the rise of cults, both within the framework of traditional religion and outside of it. All of them reveal the power of leaders over their followers.

In her paper, "Moses and the Cults: The Question of Religious Leadership," *Tikva Frymer-Kensky* analyzes the earliest history of the Jewish people, in the period following the Exodus from Egypt until their entrance into the Promised Land, as narrated in the Torah. She indicates the proclivity of the people to glorify their leader Moses, particularly since they were just emerging from slavery. The biblical narratives, however, give a picture of the consistent effort to prevent this process of idolizing Moses by keeping him a human figure and not a surrogate for God.

The tendency to apotheosize a human leader is deeply rooted in human nature. It continued into the post-Biblical period when Judaism resisted the tendency which succeeded in other religions, notably Christianity. Josephus informs us that, in the Second Commonwealth period, a leader arose claiming to know the burial-place of Moses, and Samuel Krauss suggested that here was an abortive effort to launch the Messianic movement around the figure of Moses.

An even more familiar instance is to be found in the Passover Haggadah. In this narrative of Israel's redemption from Egyptian bondage, the name of Moses does not occur. The only exception is one brief quotation of a biblical passage. Not Moses, but God, is the Redeemer of Israel.

Science and Religion

The relationship between religion and science has exercised philosophers, scientists, and religionists for centuries. The evolving nature of science and the less obvious but equally true changing character of religion make it necessary to rethink the issue in every period, and never more than in our own.

Twentieth century discoveries in macro-physics and micro-physics, which led to the enunciation of the quantum theory, have complicated the question of the relationship of religion and science in one sense, and, in another, offer a possible mode of reconciliation.

In his paper, "Asymmetry, Negative Entropy and the Problem of Evil," *Lawrence Troster*, utilizing some recent scientific discussions, indicates grounds for retaining the basic religious doctrine of human freedom.

The Significance of the "Word"

In recent years biblical scholars, as well as readers in general, have become increasingly sensitive to the use and resonance of words used in the Bible. Beyond the overt meaning or denotations are the connotations or subtler ideas or emotions that words have the power to convey.

In his paper, "Multiplicity of Meaning as a Device in Biblical Narrative," *Shubert Spero* calls attention to religious, rather than purely literary, connotations to be found in the Hebrew *dabher*, which means both "word" and "thing, matter", and is used pre-eminently for the word or the will of God. He illustrates this usage by examining the text of three biblical narratives.

"Doing" Philosophy

In the current revival of interest in the Jewish religion it is often forgotten that the Jewish tradition is not monochrome but a multicolored pattern, with various traditions crossing and criss-crossing one another. The strands include the legal, the mystical and the ethical. One of the most important, ever since Jews came in contact with the world outside, is the philosophical, which sets itself the task in each generation of interpreting the Jewish tradition in terms relevant to the age. The values and the problems connected with the philosophical enterprise are analyzed by *Neil Gillman* in his paper, "The Jewish Philosopher in Search of a Role."

The Best Life for Man

As is well known, Maimonides regarded Aristotle as the epitome of wisdom and truth, and was greatly influenced by the Greek philosopher's ideas in articulating his own position in the *Guide to the Perplexed*. It is therefore generally, but not universally, assumed that Maimonides accepts Aristotle's various categories of "the good life" as his own.

In his paper, "The End of the Guide: Maimonides on the Best Life for Man," *Daniel H. Frank* argues that, while accepting Aristotle's categories, Maimonides was powerfully influenced by the biblical view according to which God reveals Himself to man not in His essence, but in His attributes, which express His active role in history. Hence, the author argues, Maimonides develops a concept of the *summum bonum* which is deeply rooted in Jewish tradition, and includes a strong ethical component.

R.G.

We record with profound sorrow the untimely passing of an outstanding rabbinic scholar, Phillip J. Sigal, whose contributions frequently enriched the pages of JUDAISM. He was the author of a two-volume work on the history of rabbinic Judaism and many papers on early Jewish-Christian relations.

Yehi zikhro barukh.

Judah Halevi and Martin Buber on the Radicalization of Judaism

RUTH BIRNBAUM

JUDAH HALEVI AND MARTIN BUBER LIVED eight hundred years apart, an historical distance made even greater by their divergent attitudes towards tradition. Halevi displays a reverence for religious codes which stands in devout contrast to Buber's "holy insecurity." Where revelation for Halevi extends to halakhic molds of regulation, Buber denies any such institutional authority, opting instead for the uncertainty of continuing revelation. Yet, despite this basic difference, an examination of their writings reveals that they penned uniquely parallel ideas on their common rejection of philosophy as an arid and barren metaphysical land, on their existential relation to Judaism, and on their messianic approach to Zionism.

Each age generates its own idolatries. In the twelfth century, Halevi witnessed his kinsmen's preoccupation with Arabic and Greek philosophies and their attempts to harmonize the new rationalism with Judaism. In the twentieth century, Buber was concerned with the eclipse of God, the encroachments of science, and the alienation of the individual from his spiritual essence. In addition, both periods were marked by traumatic external events with internal repercussions in the Jewish community. Halevi's writings describe the precarious position of the Jew caught between the Christian and Moslem armies for the conquest of Spain. Further to the East, the Crusaders were on the march to wrest the Holy Land from the infidels.¹ The period was fraught with frenetic religious zeal which culminated three centuries later in the total expulsion of the Jews from the Iberian peninsula. In Buber's lifetime, emancipation, assimilation and then annihilation pushed the exiled Jew to the edge of existence. In retrospect, the Spanish Expulsion was merely prologue to the twentieth century Nazi plan to expel the Jews altogether from the face of the earth.

These calamities took their toll on the religious character of Judaism. The People of the Book had become, in Halevi's and Buber's words, "a

1. Heinrich Brody, ed, *Selected Poems of Jehudah Halevi* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1924), pp. 2, 96. *The Kuzari: An Argument for the Faith of Israel* (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), i. 2 p. 39.

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small and despised part of the human race.”² Jewish thinkers of both periods, medieval and modern, found consoling distraction in metaphysical pursuits and, in the process, they relegated intuition and faith, the cornerstone of Jewish religious consciousness, to a nebulous nook in the systems of philosophy. Against this common background, Halevi and Buber set out to exorcise the incubus of intellectualism and to recover the immediacy of the religious experience.

To define God in a speculative mode was the pisgah sight of Jewish thinkers. Nevertheless, it was still the God of the philosophers and not the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob with whom one could have a living-faith relationship. It was in terms of this insufficiency, writes Halevi, that Abraham, the progenitor of philosophy, abandoned his speculation in favor of the higher surety of revealed truth.³ In a return to the roots of Judaism, Halevi and Buber similarly point out that in the Bible the Hebrew verb *yada*, to know, expresses existential awareness and ultimate contact of being. By the twelfth century, however, science wore the crown of learning and “to know” became a goal rational in its essence. David’s exhortation to his son, Solomon, “know thou the God of thy fathers” (1 Chron. 28.9), was already perceived as a cognitive quest.⁴ Subsequently, rationalism reached a climax in Maimonides’ Aristotelian system where the intellectual knowledge of God became the supreme good of man.

In the modern period, Buber was heir not only to the “God is dead” syndrome of German and French thinkers, but to the dismemberment of man through the microscope of scientific objectivity. Newly developed disciplines were carving out special spheres from the wholeness of man, splintering him from the uniqueness of his being. Buber, however, spoke out against the intellectualism, scientism, and institutionalism which impeded dialogue. God had been philosophically argued, scientifically scrutinized, and religiously ritualized into a vacuous formula. Claiming that Hermann Cohen’s idea of God in his Kantian system had reached the limits of conceptualization, Buber says: “Cohen has constructed the last home for the God of the philosophers”:

This means that the philosopher would be compelled to recognize and admit the fact that his idea of the Absolute was dissolving at the point where the Absolute *lives*; that it was dissolving at the point where the Absolute is loved; because at that point the Absolute is no longer the “Absolute” about which one may philosophize, but God.⁵

In a paradoxical fulfillment, Cohen’s successful defense of the idea of

2. The complete title of Halevi’s book in its original Arabic and in its Hebrew translation is *The Book of Argument and Proof in Defense of a Despised Faith*: see i. 4 p. 40; i. 12 p. 44; Martin Buber, *Israel and Palestine* (London: East and West Library, 1952), p. xii.

3. *The Kuzari*, iv. 17 p. 223; iv. 27 p. 239; p. 308 fn. 12.

4. Martin Buber, *Good and Evil* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1953), p. 56; *The Kuzari*, v. 21 p. 292.

5. Martin Buber, *Eclipse of God* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1952), pp. 50. 54.

God tolled the end of the metaphysical mode of God. Thus, both Halevi and Buber regarded the cognitive approach to the Absolute as a point of no relational return and asserted that beyond its static nature lay a higher revealed truth, apodictically asserting itself as a compelling Presence.

The role of reason in this living encounter is also perceived by them similarly. They do not reject metaphysics as a useful human science, but disavow attempts to arrogate to science a position akin to faith. If Saadia in the tenth century found it necessary to bring the revealed truths of Scripture into harmony with the truths of philosophy, his purpose was to enhance faith, not philosophy. Two centuries later, the devotion to rational proofs dominated among the Jews of Arabic Spain, and Halevi found it necessary to liberate a spiritually sagging Judaism from the tethers of logical systems. Halevi warns his co-religionists of the snares and guiles of Greek wisdom "which hath no fruit, but only flowers." In his book, *The Kuzari*, written within the historical framework of the conversion of the Khazars to Judaism, the philosopher is unsuccessful in persuading the Khazar king that veneration of the Prime Cause is a sufficient religion for the attainment of truth, morality, and immortality. The king rejects it for its detached and contemplative nature. He has been addressed by God in his dream, and philosophy provides no response. Halevi does not deny that reason can attain to knowledge of the divine principle. "The meaning of *Elohim* can be grasped by way of speculation, because a Guide and Manager of the world is a postulate of Reason," but the philosopher could never conceive "that the Prime Cause spoke with morals."⁶ Leo Strauss points out, quite correctly, that the rabbi deprecates reason while the king is outside the Jewish community, but that he employs reason favorably after the king has been converted.⁷ To be sure, knowledge and understanding of all branches of science were necessary for the practice of the law. In fact, the rabbi informs the king, the roots and principles of all sciences originated with the Hebrews, but, in all respects, reason was to be the handmaiden of faith, not its charioteer.⁸

Like Halevi, Buber does not deny the efficacy of reason. The *I-It* sphere of intellectuality is neither negative nor evil. It becomes negative when it pretends to a totality, thereby snuffing out the possibility of dialogue. Man can not survive without objectifying the world into a repository of ideas and experiences. "Without *It* man cannot live." But he who lives with *It* alone robs himself of the uniqueness of his reality.⁹ Buber

6. *The Kuzari*, i. 4 p. 39; iv. 15. p. 222.

7. Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1952), pp. 118-119.

8. *The Kuzari*, ii. 64 p. 121; 11.66 p. 124; iii. 7 p. 142. Sec ii. 26 p. 106: "He who accepts this (service based on divine Law) completely without scrutiny or argument, is better off than he who investigates and analyses."

9. Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, tr. by Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), second edition, pp. 34, 46.

contrasts the Greek concept *sophia* with the biblical *hokhmah*. To the former, theoretical wisdom was a self-sustaining virtue. To the latter, knowledge which was not put into deed was meaningless.¹⁰ Buber does not disparage scientific and aesthetic knowledge. In response to Rotenstreich's criticism, he admits to his own dependency on the terminology of psychology and epistemology.¹¹ Such knowledge, he declares, is "necessary to man that he may do his work with precision and plunge it in the truth of relation, which is above the understanding and gathers it up in itself."¹² Buber looks upon abstract principles as isolated words in the dictionary which require a living context. "Real faith," he says, "begins when the dictionary is put down." Knowledge is a means towards the fulfillment of the dialogic life, but the burden of proof is not in speculation but in existence.¹³

Against this common background of intellectualism, Halevi and Buber boldly assert an accessible and revealing God. Then, as now, within the closed systems of philosophy, there was no room for prophecy or possibility. If Fackenheim points to Maimonides as a medieval metaphysician who could allow for the possibility of revelation, it was because Maimonides contended that the Aristotelian arguments were inconclusive to prove either the creation or the eternity of the world. Maimonides states that the utmost that can be effected by believers in the truth of revelation was to expose the shortcomings in the proofs of philosophers who held that the universe is eternal. Halevi, too, recognized that the arguments were evenly balanced, but, in view of the higher truth of revelation, he considered it a vain endeavor to confirm or refute it logically. Halevi, therefore, cut the Gordian knot by postulating creation. "If we make Creation a postulate, all that is difficult becomes easy, all that is crooked straight." For Halevi, human intellect defaults in favor of the truth of revelation.¹⁴

In his philosophy of dialogue, Buber similarly transcends the rigors of deductive reasoning. Along with the arch-rationalist Maimonides,

10. Martin Buber, *Israel and the World* (New York: Schocken Books, 1963), p. 140.

11. Nathan Rotenstreich, "The Rights and the Limitations of Buber's Dialogical Thought," p. 102 and Martin Buber, "Replies to my Critics," p. 701, both articles in Paul Arthur Schilpp and Maurice Friedman, eds., *The Philosophy of Martin Buber* (La Salle, Illinois: The Open Court Publishing Co., 1967). Rotenstreich claim that, in employing terms like "a priori," "inborn," and "instinct," Buber pays tribute to the trends of epistemology and psychology. 12. *I and Thou*, pp. 41-42.

13. Buber, "Replies to my Critics," p. 697; *Eclipse of God*, p. 14: "The more abstract the concept, the more does it need to be balanced by the evidence of living experience;" Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man* (New York, The Macmillan Co., 1965), p. 12.

14. *The Kuzari*, i. 67 p. 54; iii. 7 pp. 141-142; v. 14 p. 270; *Selected Poems of Jehudah Halevi*, p. 144: "How can understanding that is deficient and reason that is cut short / Grasp the ways of might, the high, the impregnable?"

Emil L. Fackenheim, "Martin Buber's Concept of Revelation," in Schilpp. *Op. cit.*, pp. 274-275; Moses Maimonides, *The Guide to the Perplexed*, Shlomo Pines, tr., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963, p. 180.

Buber maintains that assertions about God are limiting. But whereas Maimonides found a solution in negative attributes, Buber chose paradox as the all-encompassing statement. In logic, he maintains, A and non-A cannot exist together, but in the reality of life they are inseparable. "The unity of the contraries is the mystery at the innermost core of the dialogue."¹⁵ Man's propensity for a neatly defined and structured understanding of God necessarily bows before the antinomy of the finite and the infinite. For Buber, as for Halevi, revelation itself is the ultimate proof for the existence of God.

As mentioned earlier, the nature of revelation is differently perceived by each of the two thinkers. Halevi regards revelation as a law-giving phenomenon. The law originated with God and, by ordination to Moses, was transmitted through a chain of prophets and divinely-inspired Sages and was then written down in the Mishnah. The law and its accretions are based on a tradition and are included in the rubric of revelation. Halevi emphasizes, however, that in spite of the instrumentality of Moses and the chain of tradition, the existential relation is with God. "We are not called the people of Moses, but the people of God."¹⁶ Halevi distinguishes between the rational and social laws of the philosophers which direct man to his moral and intellectual excellence, and the revealed law which brings the Israelite closer to God. The revealed law cannot be fulfilled until the former laws are perfected. Not only does the corpus of laws attest to the nexus of concern between God and man, but the free acceptance and wholehearted practice of the revealed law evokes the immediacy of the divine Presence. It is precisely this aspect of the Judaic position which Fackenheim counterposes in his polemic against Kant who claimed that the revealed law renders irrelevant the immediacy of the divine commanding Presence.¹⁷ Halevi, whom Gershom Scholem characterizes as "the most Jewish of Jewish philosophers,"¹⁸ asserts that man cannot approach God except by His commandments. The relationship with *Adonai* is a living-faith encounter in which the Jew is brought near to God through "fear, love and joy" by means of deeds commanded by Him to be performed. In *The Kuzari* and in his poetry, Halevi eulogizes the law which brings him into intimate relation with God.¹⁹ The Sinaitic phenomenon for Halevi, therefore, is God's revelation of the law together with its tradition, and the wholehearted observance of the law evokes the immediacy and the continuing reality of revelation.

In contrast to Halevi, Buber categorically denies "that revelation is

15. *Israel and the World*, p. 17; "Replies to my Critics," p. 701.

16. *The Kuzari*, ii. 56 p. 117; iii. 23 p. 162; iii. 39 pp. 170-171; iii. 67 pp. 191-192; v. 14 p. 274.

17. *The Kuzari*, iii. 53 p. 183; ii. 46 p. 111; see Emil L. Fackenheim, "Abraham and the Kantians," in *Encounters Between Judaism and Modern Philosophy* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1973), pp. 48-49.

18. Gershom G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1941), p. 24.

19. *The Kuzari*, ii. 50 p. 113; v. 20 p. 288. *Selected Poems of Jehudah Halevi*, pp. 108, 112.

ever a formulation of law." "Though man is a law-receiver, God is not a law-giver." Buber thus distinguishes between revelation-as-law and revelation-as-teaching in which the spoken word is revealed again and again in its primal utterance.²⁰ Buber disclaims any finished statements about God which were handed down from Sinai. The Bible as the written word of God is a mixture of the manufactured words of man and the received word from God. Moreover, since there is no objective distinction between the two, each generation must struggle anew with its emerging message. Consequently, where Halevi is calm and unswerving in his observance of the commandments, Buber sees no alternative but to make his choices in "fear and trembling."²¹

As another point of departure, Halevi alleges a nationalistic and biological uniqueness regarding revelation. He reserves the prophetic faculty exclusively for the people of Israel, who, he claims, are genetically gifted to receive divine communication. Converts attain to a pious and learned state, but they lack the prophetic potential. For Buber, on the other hand, the doors of dialogue are open to all, but he admits that no other community of human beings has responded with such strength and fervor as the Jews.²²

Because of their divergent positions on the law and on the innate capacity for prophecy, Halevi and Buber regard disclosure of the divine Presence as differently graced. Halevi links the supreme reward to the perfect fusion of inner intention and outer deed in the performance of the *mizvot* of the Torah. "The ways of her Maker she shall see." For Buber, reward lies in mutuality in the Great Dialogue. "The relation means being chosen and choosing." Man cannot attain grace through any definite act, but he can begin by turning to God. God "wants to let Himself be won by man . . . God wants to come to His world, but He wants to come to it through man." "Grace is God's answer" to man.²³

Whereas Halevi's response to revelation-as-law blunts somewhat the edge of possibility, Buber's unconditioned openness to the spoken word is of the essence of possibility. Fackenheim, in attempting to formulate a modern critique of revelation states:

Buber's body of doctrine, even if wholly derived from committed *I-Thou* knowledge, would still be a body of doctrine. It would contain a critique of *I-It* knowledge and an interpretation of the status of *I-Thou* knowledge; it would identify revelation as part of a kind of *I-Thou* knowledge and refute those who assert that revelation is impossible.²⁴

20. See Ruth Birnbaum, "The Man of Dialogue and the Man of Halakhah," JUDAISM, 26, 1 (Winter 1977): 52-62.

21. *The Kuzari*, iii. 37 p. 169: Those who practice God's commandments "are at ease with their tradition and their soul is calm. . . ."; *Israel and the World* p. 89; Buber, "Autobiographical Fragments," Schilpp., *Op. cit.*, p. 33; "Replies to my Critics," p. 699.

22. *The Kuzari*, i. 27 p. 47; i. 115 p. 79; *Israel and the World*, p. 16.

23. *Selected Poems of Jehuda Halevi*, p. 108; Martin Buber, *To Hallow This Life*, ed. Jacob Trapp (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), pp. 30, 34.

Buber's response, however, removes any hope for a metaphysical and epistemological formulation. The "eternal butterfly"²⁵ nature of the *I-Thou* communication cannot be held captive in philosophical nets. Only the continuity of the *I-It* knowledge is conceptually assured, but, then again, God cannot legitimately be made the object of an assertion. "I have no teaching," Buber repeats, "but I carry on a conversation. . . . I only point to something. . . . I have nothing but the certainty that we share in the revelation."²⁶ Thus, whereas for Halevi the message at Sinai is both formally transmissible and existentially realizable, Buber's man remains precariously perched on the "narrow rocky ridge between the gulfs where there is no sureness of expressible knowledge. . . ."²⁷ In the language of imperatives, Halevi's response to revelation-as-law represents the historical essence of Judaism transmitted as a categorical imperative to the believer. For Buber, who responds to Sinai as revelation-as-teaching, the openness of the dialogic experience is the existential imperative which precedes essence.

Without attempting to gloss over the aforesaid distinctions, there is, nevertheless, a clear radical approach to revelation which permeates Halevi's dialogue of philosophy²⁸ and Buber's philosophy of dialogue. For both there is a breaking-through of the barriers to perceive anew the pristine character of the divine Presence in everyday living.

The similarity of the existential relation becomes even more apparent once we penetrate the mantle of language. The observance of the law, which, for Halevi, places man in relation to his fellow man, is reverberated in Buber's primal category of "between." At this juncture, the *I* comes into being when it speaks *Thou* to others. The commandments and the *I-Thou* meeting thus both serve to establish a genuine community of rapport. The social and religious precepts which, for Halevi, evoke the immediacy of the divine Presence, are echoed in Buber's philosophy of dialogue as "In your love for your neighbor you will find Me;" "Every particular *Thou* is a glimpse through to the eternal *Thou*," and "The relation with man is the real simile of the relation with God."²⁹ Consequently, any asceticism which leads to a monastic seclusion is commonly rejected. "A servant of God is not one who detaches himself from the world," says Halevi.³⁰ According to Buber, one who seeks God in isolation from his

24. "Martin Buber's Concept of Revelation," pp. 293-294; *Israel and the World*, p. 95: "To endure revelation is to endure this moment full of possible decisions . . ."

25. *I and Thou*, p. 17 "The *It* is the eternal chrysalis, the *Thou* the eternal butterfly . . ."

26. "Replies to My Critics," pp. 693, 699, 743; Martin Buber, *For the Sake of Heaven* (New York: Meridian Brooks and Jewish Publication Society, 1959), p. xiii.

27. *Between Man and Man*, p. 184.

28. "Jehuda Halevi: Kuzari," in *Three Jewish Philosophers*, ed. Isaak Heinemann (New York: Atheneum, 1973), pp. 11-12: "It is the only genuine dialogue (extending beyond a mere catechism of question and answer) in Jewish philosophy of the Middle Ages."

29. *Between Man and Man*, p. 203; Martin Buber, *At the Turning* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Young, 1952), p. 43; *I and Thou*, pp. 75, 103.

fellow man, seeks to objectify Him. For this reason, Buber criticized Kierkegaard who renounced Regina Olsen as an object of worldliness standing between him and his love of God. "God wants us to come to Him by means of the Reginas he has created and not by renunciation of them." Buber speaks in Halevi's language when he declares that man cannot seek God by transcending his fellow man, for there is no place in this world where He cannot be found. Compare Halevi's poem:

Lord, where shall I find Thee?
 High and Hidden is Thy Place;
 And where shall I not find Thee?
 The world is full of Thy glory.³¹

In their common stand against the objectification of God, Halevi speaks in Buber's language when he says, the Tetragrammaton "is a proper name which takes no article." In Buber's words, He is the ineffable *Thou* which "may . . . only be addressed, not expressed."³²

Similarly, in the learning process, the emphasis of both Halevi and Buber is on the face-to-face meeting. Says Halevi, "The proverb is: 'From the mouths of scholars, but not from the mouth of books.'" Knowledge transmitted by the printed word alone is an inert storehouse of facts which requires a dialogic presence to penetrate to the inner core of understanding. The teacher "must be really there, really facing the child, not merely there in spirit," iterates Buber.³³ The content of their individual messages shines through the language barrier and is not eclipsed by their divergence on the law. In essence, Halevi and Buber affirm that each existential involvement is a beam of understanding leading to divine illumination.

Another ground of meeting in the return to the roots of Judaism is the place of the Holy Land in the redemptive scheme. Halevi and Buber perceive the immediacy of the religious experience as being bound up with the destiny of the Jewish people in their own land. In order for faith and community to be brought to perfect realization, they must be nurtured in the soil where the prophetic spirit has its roots, and where the land is an active partner in the covenant. "Dost thou not see that even the land was given its Sabbaths. . . ." says Halevi. He explains this interrelationship of faith, people and land thus:

Its fertility or barrenness, its happiness or misfortune, depend upon the divine influence which your conduct will merit. . . . For if the divine presence is among you, you will perceive by the fertility of your country, by the regularity with which your rainfalls appear in their due seasons, by your vic-

30. *The Kuzari*, iii. 1 p. 135.

31 *Between Man and Man*, p. 52; *Selected Poems of Jehuda Halevi*, p. 134; Buber uses the lines in Halevi's poem attributing them to "A wise man of the Middle Ages." See *Israel and the World*, p. 15.

32 *The Kuzari*, iv. 3 p. 201; *I and Thou*, p. 81.

33 *The Kuzari*, ii. 72 p. 126; *Between Man and Man*, p. 98.

tories over your enemies in spite of your inferior numbers, that your affairs are not managed by simple laws of nature, but by the divine Will.³⁴

Compare Buber's statement:

The very nature of the land of Canaan bears witness to the unremitting providence of God, and it is its nature that qualifies it to be the pledge of the covenant. . . . In Canaan Israel realizes that rain is a gift and it recognizes the giver.³⁵

Halevi did not regard the return to Zion as a prayerful abstraction but as a goal to be acted upon. In his poetry, he laments that Palestine had become a place for consecrated burial rather than a place consecrated for the living word of God to issue forth:

Is it well that the dead should be remembered,
And the Ark and the Tablets forgotten?
That we should seek out the place of the pit and the worm,
And forsake the fount of life eternal?³⁶

The Holy Land is not a sepulchre for the commemoration of glories past, but a living heritage to herald the redemption of the messianic age to come. Halevi's writings act as a spiritual prelude and a goad for the actual journey to Palestine. In the twelfth century, however, there was no apprehension that a return to Zion could mean anything other than an act of faith which seeks to fulfill its covenantal charge.

Buber in the twentieth century expresses the reality of Zion as a sacred mission. It is "the holy matrimony of a 'holy' people with a 'holy' land." In the mutual relationship of the people of Israel with the land of Israel, and in their mutual responsibility to God, they are unique and incomparable.³⁷ Although Buber believed that the ideal of Zionism did not rest consummate in the formation of the political state, the political state was necessary to implement the ideal. In an open letter to Gandhi, he describes the indissolubility of the Jewish destiny whose fulfillment is bound up with the land. Zionism is a mission "that cannot be realized by individuals in the sphere of their private existence, but only by a nation in the establishment of its society . . . (and) we need our own soil in order to fulfill it."³⁸ For both Halevi and Buber the return to the Holy Land was not just a theoretical ideal to be critically examined, but a goal to be actualized in its living reality. It was the inevitable consequence of an existential faith which sought realization in its indigenous roots.

In Buber's lifetime, the ingathering of the Jews in the land of Israel became a reality, but he continued to speak out against any diminution in the world redemptive scheme. He bemoaned the fact that the spiritually

34 *The Kuzari*, i. 109 p. 75; ii. 14 p. 89; ii. 18 p. 93; *Israel and Palestine*, p. 25.

35 Martin Buber, *On Zion; The History of an Idea*, tr. Stanley Goldman (London, 1973), pp. 25, 27.

36 *Selected Poems of Jehuda Halevi*, p. 15; *The Kuzari*, v. 22 p. 293.

37 *Israel and Palestine*, pp. x, xii.

38 *Israel and the World*, p. 229.

uncommitted Israelis had divested the religious forms of their religious content. It was not that Zionism in its messianic goal was irredeemable, but that the redemptive path had not yet been taken.

In the twelfth century, Halevi's views had little impact on the rising tide of Jewish medieval intellectualism. In spite of the "Jewishness" of his philosophy, his writings represented a minority opinion — recognized, recorded, but overruled. On the other hand, in spite of the fact that Buber rejected institutional law, the biblical provenance of his ideas is ubiquitous in his writings. His thought has infiltrated into modern Jewish theology and has injected a dynamic element of religiosity into contemporary Jewish practices. Maurice Friedman designates Buber as the spokesman for Judaism to the world. Indeed, the seminal nature of Buber's ideas has been so pervasive that, over the years, his thought has been apposed to that of many theologians and philosophers, Gentile as well as Jewish.

In overcoming the barriers of time and space in this study, the comparison of Halevi and Buber was not intended to be a mere exercise in Procrustean techniques. Rather, its purpose is to point out the salient similarities in spite of the differences and thereby to point the way to new perspectives for contemporary understanding.

The Psychobiography of a Dialogue: Buber and the Biblical Abraham

HENRY ABRAMOVITCH

"The Psychology of the Chronicler": A Case Study

IN HIS IMPORTANT ESSAY, "ON THE NATURE of Psycho-Historical Evidence: In Search of Gandhi" (*Daedalus* [Summer 1978]) Erikson pointed to the need for a "psychology of the Chronicler." The Chronicler, he proposed, could be analyzed in terms of his own life cycle as well as the broader historical context. Specifically, the "historical moment" in which the chronicler produced his document should be considered with respect to the point in the chronicler's own life cycle, the life cycle of his community and the more general historical background. In this way, Erikson maintained, one could use such a framework to assess how the chronicler's relation to his subject in turn affects the resulting portrait.

To use another Eriksonian metaphor, this article attempts at understanding how one recent "Great Man," Martin Buber, depicted an ancient "Great Man," the Biblical Abraham, known in Hebrew tradition as "Our Father Abraham" (*avraham avinu*). Using Erikson's framework for the "psychology of the chronicler," this study will show Buber in dialogue with the First of the Patriarchs, his own "Great Father," and explore the conception of Abraham in terms of Buber's own life history, his cultural and philosophic milieu, his place within his communal Hebrew tradition and, most poignantly, the "historical moment" in which Buber's major document was produced. The result will be a case study in the psychology of the chronicler/biographer, that will still be in keeping with Buber's own philosophy of dialogue.

A Humanist Survivor's Conception of Abraham

The Document

In this study, we shall appraise a literary article, published both in Nazi Germany and British Mandate Palestine, by the Hebrew philosopher, Martin Mordechai Buber. The German version, "*Zur Erzählung von Abraham*" (1939), after the outbreak of the Second World War, was the last act of Buber's spiritual resistance in Germany. The Hebrew version, "*Sheliḥut Shel Avraham*", published in the same year, was one of his very

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first public statements in Palestine after coming to take up a chair at the Hebrew University. In this psychobiography of Buber's conception of Abraham, we shall show how the author's own analysis reflects his twin roles as a premature survivor of the immanent holocaust and a pioneer in the Zionist adventure. Buber regarded Abraham as the first and greatest exponent of the "philosophy of dialogue." Abraham's daring defense of the Sodomites, for example, was the prototype of a human "I" encountering the eternal "Thou." In his article, Buber was primarily concerned with Abraham's spiritual development and the birth of prophecy, but a psychobiography of his dialogue with his Father Abraham reveals the influences from his own life history.

Martin Buber (1878-1965): Hebrew Humanist

Martin Buber was born in Vienna. When he was three his parents were divorced and he was sent to live with his grandparents in provincial Galicia, where his grandfather, Solomon Buber, a renowned Jewish scholar and editor of the Midrash, provided him with a thorough foundation in Judaism. Perhaps from his grandmother's influence he acquired a deep love for languages, particularly German.

He studied philosophy and the history of art in Vienna and went on, as was allowed in the German-speaking universities, to study in Leipzig and in Zurich (1899). In 1900 he went to Berlin to study *Geistwissenschaft* under Dilthey and Simmel and, ultimately, completed his doctoral studies in 1904 with a thesis on the development of German mysticism. During his student days, he became a passionate convert to Zionism, under the inspiring leadership of his fellow Viennese, Theodor Herzl. For a period, they worked closely, editing a Zionist journal and participating in the earliest Zionist Congresses. In 1904, Buber broke with Herzl and with the official Zionist movement and turned to literary pursuits.

The conflict with Herzl's political Zionism did not sever Buber's connection with Zionism as a spiritual ideal. He had never believed in the formation of a Jewish state as an end in itself. Zionism and the settlement of Palestine were to bring about a spiritual renaissance of the Jewish People, based on principles of justice and righteousness. Buber strongly advocated cooperation between Arabs and Jews in Palestine and organized associations which he hoped might lead to a regional federation.

Though he later wrote a few poems and a novel, Buber first made an international reputation by collecting and retelling Hasidic legends. Hasidism was a spiritual revival which arose in the 18th Century in Eastern Europe. Its mystical nature, its sense of relation with God as acted out in life, and its connection with the land of his childhood appealed to him and what began as a study in folklore became a spiritual calling. However, because he regarded Mosaic law as a specific human response to revelation and not binding on later generations, Buber was never fully accepted

by Torah-observant Hasidic groups. His philosophy of dialogue, first conceived during World War I and formulated in *I and Thou* (1923), owes much or, at least, reflects much, of his experience of Hasidism.

In the 1920s, Buber and Rosenzweig, at the latter's initiative, undertook the joint translation of the entire Old Testament from Hebrew into German, a task which Buber completed only in the last years of his long life. In this translation, he tried to recreate, as far as possible, the sound, rhythm and verbal roots of the original Hebrew. He claimed that the significance, the "narrated theology" of the Biblical narratives, became manifest when one examined the repeated verbal roots of the story. Biblical narratives, especially Genesis, he argued, were composed to be spoken aloud so that these repeated roots — "to see" in the story of the *akedah*¹ — made their impact aurally, even if unconsciously.² To treat the biblical text as a written document was to falsify its original intention.

From 1925 until 1933, when the Nazis deposed him, Buber was Professor of Religion and Ethics at the University of Frankfurt. After the Nazi takeover he continued to offer "spiritual resistance" to the regime, organizing adult Jewish education, lecturing, writing, and encouraging. In 1938, he joined his children in Palestine and assumed the chair in Social Philosophy at The Hebrew University in Jerusalem. In 1939, he published his article on "Abraham the Seer" and wrote many books and articles on Jewish and religious topics. He retired from the University in 1951 but continued to write and lecture until his death, in 1965, at the age of 88.

"Concerning the Narrative of Abraham"

In 1939, Buber published the two versions of his article on Abraham. The German one lacks the prefatory discussion of recent scholarship — archeological, linguistic, critical and sociological — which reaffirms the essentially historical character of Abraham's story, but this material is included in the Hebrew version. The German article appeared in December of 1939 — after WWII had begun — in the final issue of the *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums*, founded eight-seven

1. "Akedah," Hebrew for "binding," is usually used to refer to the "binding of Isaac." Note that the Hebrew designation stands in theological contrast with the usual Christian term, "sacrifice of Isaac," which stresses the link with the story of Jesus. Hebrew tradition maintains that, in the end, Isaac was not sacrificed, but only "offered up for sacrifice." For a fascinating exception, see Shalom Spiegel, *The Last Trial* (New York: Schocken, 1966), which describes a medieval tradition in which Abraham slew his son who was subsequently resurrected.

2. The verbal roots in Chapter 22 of Genesis are: "... and he saw (*vaya'r*) the place from afar (v. 4) ... Abraham said: God will show (*yir'eh*) the lamb for offering (v. 8) ... for God sees (*yirei*) (v. 12) ... and he saw (*vaya'r*) Behold! a ram (v. 13) ... and Abraham called the name of the place 'Yahwe Yir'eh' as it is said unto today 'on the Mountain Yahwe shall be seen (*yeir'eah*), (v. 14)."

years previously. This issue of the journal was confiscated by the Gestapo and only offprints survived. The Hebrew version, published in the Tel Aviv daily, *Ha-aretz*, was Buber's new beginning as the spokesman for Hebrew Humanism.³

The other structural difference between the two versions of the article was the title. The German one, which seems to have been the original, was "*Zur Erzählung von Abraham*" — "Concerning the Narrative of Abraham." The Hebrew title is "*Shelihut Avraham*" or "Abraham's Mission" and emphasizes the lasting actuality of Abraham for the Hebrew people, stressing their mission to become a community of nations with, perhaps, immediate relevance to Arab-Jewish cooperation in a bi-national regional federation. For those remaining behind in Germany, Buber stressed the latent meaning of the biblical narrative, emphasizing that to understand Abraham it was necessary to read "between the lines."

Buber begins his article by contrasting his approach with that of the 19th century biblical critics who saw Genesis as a series of tribal myths collated by various hands: they did not regard the personages in Genesis as living individuals. While he did not believe that Genesis was necessarily accurate history or that it was the work of a single hand, he saw the story as a theological unit compiled and written no later than the days of Solomon. For him, Genesis was not imaginative fiction but a supreme blend of traditional conceptions of the father of the people, and at the core of those conceptions the hallowed tradition was passed orally, from person to person, from soul to soul, not simply as myth but as part of the governing spiritual heritage of the people. The biblical narrative was decidedly a legitimate way of giving an account of what happened, and was much more powerful than mere history, for it was a spiritual account, or "*Heilsgeschichte*," culminating in the creation of a religious and political mission that still had special relevance thousands of years later in Buber's day.

What attracted Buber to Abraham, over and above all else, was the intimacy of the relation between man and God, between the human "I" and the eternal "Thou": the origin of the decisive relationship between humanity and Spiritual Being. Abraham lived in a time before Rabbinic Law, before regulation and official ritual and sanction, an era which Buber embraced in his own idiosyncratic attitude towards Judaism. Although he never explicitly made the identification, some critics have contended that he ". . . is entitled to be recognized as a true representative in our time of the Abrahamic man".⁴

3. There are also two English versions of the article: "Abraham the Seer," tr. by Sophie Meyer, *JUDAISM*, 5, 4 (1956) and "Abraham the Seer," in *On the Bible*, ed. N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken Books, 1963).

4. Ray Oliver, *The Wanderer and the Way: The Hebrew Tradition in the Writing of Martin Buber* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1968), p. 42.

Buber's Conception of Abraham's Life Structure

Unlike the Rabbinic conception of Abraham's life as comprising ten trials, Buber regarded Abraham's life as structured around seven spiritual revelations. These "appear as stations in a progress from trial to trial and from blessing to blessing; not one of them can be transposed without disrupting the whole." Taken together, they represent the stages of Abraham's spiritual progress towards YHWH and the realization of his mission.

Buber focussed on Abraham's personal relation to his God, showing the relation between a spiritual human and the eternal Thou. Buber's philosophy of the encounter as an experience in itself, outside of space and time, led him to the relative disregard of family dynamics and social needs in Abraham's life. The essence of the Bible was the unfolding of the dialogue between man and God, and the prophetic tradition, which had Abraham at its head, demonstrated the force of personal relation with one Spiritual Being. Abraham's revelation of the one God represented the archetypal spiritual quest.

Like the Rabbis, Buber saw Abraham's life against the background of the first eleven chapters of Genesis. The patriarch's biography was a turning point between the story of the failure of the first human race at the time of Noah and again at Babel, and the story of the growth of the people of Israel under the shadow of the call and the promise. As a humanist, Buber stressed the universal blessings promised in the story of Abraham. After the "scattering" and confusion of humanity at Babel, Abraham appears as a new beginning for mankind, through whom all the nations of the world would be blessed. He thus plays a pivotal role in providing a destiny, through the One God, to one people who, through their example, would show the possibility of a joining of peoples into a new human community, reviving YHWH's original intention of a unified human community.

Abraham's Revelations

(1) Early Life:

In his classic *I and Thou* Buber wrote:

The encounter with God does not come in order that man may henceforth attend to God but in order that he may prove its meaning in action in the world. All revelation is a calling and a mission.⁵

Abram's first encounter with God at Haran provided him with a calling and a mission, not only for himself but for all his generations (Hebrew: *toldoth*). Appropriately, he begins his mission not with words but with action, as it is written: "So Abram went as YHWH had told him" (Genesis 12:4).

5. *I and Thou: A New Translation with a Prologue and Notes* by Walter Kaufman (New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1970), p. 103.

Abram sets out with blessings and promises, travelling with his wife and his nephew, but the major theme of his migration is separation. In taking the role of “nomad of faith,” Abram was forsaking his father’s house, his father’s gods and his former life. This theme of separation would continue throughout his spiritual career. In order to maintain his relation with the divine, he would divorce himself from wife, nephew, first son and chosen son, only to reap greater blessings in the end. In this first trial, as in the last, Abram does not even know his exact destination; only later will he learn that his God had guided his life from the time of the original move from Ur to Haran (cf. Genesis 15:6).

Buber, basing himself on archeological finds, noted that both Ur and Haran were centers for the worship of the moon god. In addition, Joshua 24:2 states that Abraham’s father Terah had served other gods in Mesopotamia. Buber explored the relationship that Abraham and his father might possibly have had with the moon god, which was sacred to travellers and night caravaneers who guided themselves by its light. Here was a step towards monotheism because, in a sense, it was not bounded by space: the moon can shine over much of the earth at once. But the moon is visible only on clear nights, and its worship was limited in space, rooted in the temple. By contrast, the as-yet-unnamed God of Abraham, who spoke to him in Haran, was a universal being, not bound to any place or time. For a wayfarer like Abraham, the advantages of a universal divinity were obvious and immediate. He could go anywhere and still maintain contact with God; his children could live for generations and still stand in relation to the same “Eternal One,” unbounded by time.

Buber was not interested in the details of Abram’s Mesopotamian experience. Like the Book of Genesis, he relentlessly focussed on biographic instances of spiritual inspiration and development, but unlike the Rabbinic tradition he did not invent a childhood for Abram;⁶ such stories were irrelevant to his view of Abram’s spiritual evolution. What mattered was not Abram’s character, as God found it, but what Abram did and what he became.

(2) Wanderer:

In his initial transition from Mesopotamia to Hebron, Abram not only covers the greatest physical distance but also makes the most spiritual progress. He experiences two revelations during this period of wandering. When he first “sees” the land he also encounters — “sees” — YHWH

6. For a collection of traditional tales, see Louis Ginsberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 7 vols. (New York: Jewish Publication Society, 1962).

It is noteworthy that Scripture contains no reference to Abraham’s mother, his childhood or youth. For a discussion of the significance of the suppression of any remnant of Abraham’s early years and subsequent Rabbinic accretions, see my unpublished doctoral dissertation, “Abraham: Psychology of a Spiritual Revolutionary and his Hebrew Chroniclers,” Yale University, Ph.D. 1977.

for the first time, at Schechem. Abram is the first person in Scripture to “see” God; Adam and Noah only *hear* God but do not *see* Him. Abram also begins to see his way towards the mission which YHWH has prepared for him, to understand and believe that his seed will inhabit and take root in the land.

As Abram wanders through the land he builds altars and calls on the name of the Lord, not as prayer, and “certainly not as a sermon to the heathen,” but as a *proclamation*. As a herald of the Lord, the God of the future nation of Israel, Abram goes before Him making his way through the future province of YHWH and proclaiming it as YHWH’s property and residence by calling out His name.

The second revelation occurs after the separation from Lot (Gen. 13:14), and marks the next stage of Abram’s spiritual development. In this separation, Abram takes an important first step in establishing the purity of his succession. Then, the union between the people who are to become as “numerous as the dust of the earth” and the land which is promised to them is reaffirmed: Abram is ordered to move through the land and to take symbolic possession of it. In his venturing he builds an altar wherever he stops to show the presence of the Lord in the land.

In focussing on this pair of revelations, Buber does not mention any of the dramatic “secular” events of Abram’s wandering. There is no mention of the famine in the land of Canaan — a fact perhaps too well known to the struggling Jewish settlements in Palestine. Abram’s escape from Egypt is only hinted at in the suggestion that this incident is an example of how Abram’s biography might have served as a portent to his descendants. For Buber’s own part, he may have elected to avoid purely existential details of Abram’s survival because it was so close to his own painful sense of continuing survivorhood and escape.

(3) Founder:

Buber generally pays scant attention to Abram’s military career, but does take note of the parley between Abram and the King of Salem, immediately prior to Abram’s first covenant with YHWH. To justify his own interpretation of the dialogue, he follows the example of some German biblical scholars and posits different sources which underlie the present text. In his book, *The Prophetic Faith*, he argues that Abram’s reply to the King of Sodom: “I have lifted up my hand to YHWH El Elyon, founder of Heaven and Earth —” (Gen. 14:22) had really been addressed to Melkhizedek, High Priest and King of Salem, in an original text. Buber had a strong dislike for missionary proselytizing and felt uncomfortable about Abram’s thus praising YHWH before a decadent secular authority — the King of Sodom — for purely political purposes. His addressing the remark to Melkhizedek tended rather “to prove the merit of Jerusalem to be the cultic center of the world” and, as such, served as part of the political and religious justification of the new state of Israel.

Melkhizedek's own words are a poetic prelude to the central revelation of Abram's life. The priest-king praises El Elyon ("the greatest God" for having delivered up (Hebrew: *miggen*) Abram's enemies into his hands. The subsequent encounter with YHWH begins, "Fear not, Abram, I am a shield (Hebrew: *magen*) for you" (Gen. 14:1). In a Torah scroll the two Hebrew words are written identically; the difference in vowel content can be deduced only by the context, and these words appear nowhere else in Genesis. The two passages are thus linked by the common sound. Because of his aural, poetic, approach to the Torah, Buber was particularly sensitive to these semantic similarities. Additionally, Abram and Melkhizedek both call on El Elyon — "Master of Heaven and Earth" — and this use of the same descriptive Hebrew root provides the latent theological link between the Patriarch and the King of Salem.

In the subsequent revelation (Genesis 15:1-21) real dialogue between Abram and YHWH begins. Abram bemoans his childlessness and receives, in return, an outright promise not only of an heir but of a multitude of descendants. The bond between man and God is affirmed by the passing of the flame among the pieces of the sacrificial animals. Continuing to build on the poetic metaphor of the root "to see," Buber notes that Abram *saw* the heavens, *saw* the flame, *saw* that his past had been guided by YHWH and *saw* into the future of his people, that they would be exiled in a strange land. Buber's architectonic stress on the metaphor of "seeing" YHWH, knowing his will, would have been doubly poignant for his German Jewish audience who lived in a time when YHWH was said to have "hidden his face" from the people of the earth.

Buber does not dwell on Abram's use of sacrifice, nor does he mention the "deep sleep and terror" which overwhelms Abram after the sacrifice (Genesis 15:12). This aftermath of the sacrifice has been neglected by most chroniclers but is deliberately suppressed by Buber, I think, because it opposed his conception of the divine encounter as a mutual and creative relation. The narrative here shows Abram overwhelmed by, and utterly subservient to, the Holy One, quite unlike the later encounter at Sodom. This dread, along with the general loss of theophany-consciousness, of the ecstatic element, competes with Buber's notion of revelation as a form of silent encounter or direct conversation with the Eternal You, as in the earlier part of the revelation. The "sleep and terror" may also have evoked survivor guilt among his fellow Jews in Germany, already hyperconscious to being condemned to suffer cruelties in exile.

More dramatically, Buber suppresses details concerning the birth of Ishmael despite the fact that they involve a revelation — though not one in which Abraham participates actively. Buber's de-emphasis of Ishmael's role in the life of Abram perhaps mirrors his own difficulties in reconciling the Arabs — traditionally the sons of Ishmael — with the sons of Israel.

(4) Rebirth:

On the verge of Abraham's hundredth year, YHWH allows Himself "to be seen" for a second time. In this fifth revelation Abraham is commanded to "go" before the Lord and to become whole (Hebrew: *tammim*) in so doing. Buber understood this "going before the Lord" not as a form of prayer or proselytization but of declamation. Abraham is to go before the Lord calling out his name YHWH, which Buber understood as "He Who Is There," thus pointing to the essence, and announcing the existence, of the one God at Mamre and His absolute dominion throughout the land. Symbolically, Abraham's lonely passage — Buber hardly mentions his travelling companions — is in anticipation of the time when his descendants would claim the land under YHWH's aegis.

Abram is no longer to be called by that name. Borrowing one letter — 'H' — from YHWH's name, he is henceforth to be known as Abraham. With this new name comes a new identity and the promise not only to be father of a chosen people but to be father of a multitude of nations, to be "Av-raham." Drawing on his personal religious credo, Buber gave the promise of rebirth an ecumenist interpretation; he saw the promise as referring to a future humanity of many peoples which was to develop through the noble example of Israel.

In Buber's view the circumcision ritual, the sign of the covenant, sanctified the act of procreation and the growth of the nation of Israel through procreation. Circumcision became the living symbol of man's continuing mutual bond with YHWH. The mass circumcision formally marked the transition from YHWH as a guardian of a single man, the God of Abraham, to God as guardian of a community of men, of many peoples, and ultimately as the Lord of History. For Abraham's own life it marked a new stage of intimacy with his Lord, in preparation for the dialogue between Abraham and YHWH over the fate of Sodom.

(5) The First Prophet:

The sixth revelation, the debate over Sodom, approximates most closely Buber's ideal form of dialogue. It is the incident which, for Buber, firmly establishes Abraham as a prophet, as one who mediates between heaven and earth. Buber emphasized that Hebrew prophecy began with Abraham "by virtue of (Abraham's) compassion and his fearless intercession in the face of God for the object of his compassion." Although Hebrew tradition recognizes Abraham as a prophet, it does not usually identify the origins of prophecy in him even though the word for prophet — *navi* — is first used in connection with him (Genesis: 20:3). Some Rabbinic traditions taught that prophecy predated the patriarch, beginning either with Adam (as in Islamic tradition), with Enoch, who "walked with God," or with Noah. Another Rabbinic tradition claims that Sarah was greater in prophecy than her husband. Ramban acknowledged Abraham as a prophet but, as a strict follower of Mosaic law, he regarded Moses as

the pre-eminent prophet. Buber, however, who did not observe the “613 prescriptions,” did not feel constrained by the Law. For him, the prophetic ideal exists within the intimate encounter of a human “I” with an “Eternal Thou,” as best expressed in the “boldest speech of man in all the bible,” Abraham’s plea for the saving grace of the just. Buber himself took similarly strong moral stands. In 1929, while still in Germany, he organized a Jewish protest against the execution of Arab terrorists who had been sentenced to death by the British authorities for the massacre of Jews in Palestine. After the rise of Hitler he continued to speak out emphatically and at considerable personal risk on Jewish issues. Like Abraham, he saw the smoke rising from the disaster only from afar. Returning to Germany after the War to accept a peace prize, he confessed that he had only in a formal sense a common humanity with those who had taken part in the extermination of the Jews, but stressed his reverence and love for those few who had refused to assist in the extermination and had actively opposed them — the potential saving minority of just men.

For Buber, the call to *akedah* is the apex of Abraham’s spiritual career. This encounter parallels the first encounter in Haran, beginning with the same words “Get thee . . .” and continues with the same instructions to separate himself — then from the world of his father, now from the world of his son. In each case YHWH does not tell Abraham where He is sending him. The decisive difference between the first calling and the last lies in that in the former Abraham is going *to* a promise, while in the latter he is going to the rescinding of that promise, at the command of Him who promises and grants all. In each case, Abraham responds to the call, not with words, but with action; in both encounters the words used are, “And he went.”

Buber does not dwell on the drama of the deed, but focusses again on the poetic theme of “seeing”: Abraham *sees* the place where the sacrifice must be accomplished. To Yizhak’s question he responds that YHWH will “see to” the victim for the burnt offering. At the last moment Abraham looks up and *sees* the ram as a substitute for his son. Over the altar he proclaims “the name that makes known the imperishable essence of this place, Mount Moriah: YHWH Will See.” The culminating revelation is one in which YHWH sees man and man sees YHWH. YHWH sees Abraham in his faithfulness. Abraham sees YHWH with the eye of his action and receives the highest blessings in the moment of his greatest readiness to sacrifice.

Omissions and Suppressions

In writing his “spiritual biography” of Abraham, Buber focussed on the maturation of Abraham’s religious experience and the developmental stages in the discovery of his divine mission. Most secular aspects of

Abraham's life story, as recorded in Genesis, were omitted. However, he also omitted one potentially important encounter between Abraham and his Lord.

Buber had written that the "story of Isaac's birth is followed first by the expulsion of Ishmael, sanctioned by God for the sake of Israel's mission." This sanctioning of the expulsion of Ishmael should have constituted an additional revelation to the seven specified by Buber: "And God said to Abraham: do not distress yourself on account of the boy and your slavegirl. Grant Sarah all she asks of you for it is through Yizhak that your name will be carried on; but the slavegirl's son I will also make into a nation, for he is your child too" (Genesis 21:12-13). Yet Buber chose not to include this encounter among the revelations of Abraham.

The overt reason for excluding the encounter seems to be that it is strikingly out of place in Buber's conception of Abraham's spiritual development. He saw seven clear stations in Abraham's mission from its inception at Haran to its completion at Mount Moriah. The encounter over Ishmael was merely a form of justification for a personally painful decision rather than an instance of spiritual progress. As such, therefore, it had no place in the spiritual flow between Haran and Moriah.

However, an important covert reason for Buber's suppression of this revelation may lie in the fact that Buber had invested considerable effort in the reconciliation between Arab and Jew, between the sons of Ishmael and the sons of Yizhak. Like Abraham, he felt grieved by the rejection of "Ishmael" and even remarked that the nation of Israel would be judged by its treatment of Palestinian Arabs. To call attention to Abraham's rejection of Ishmael would not help the cause of reconciliation. Because the Bible had such a strong living presence for Buber, his readers, and the entire Jewish settlement, he may have suppressed the biblical order to expel Ishmael lest Abraham's example be followed in his own day.

Again, in summarizing his view of "Abraham the seer," Buber traced three important ideas back to Abraham: the origin of the people, the mission of the people to become a community of nations, and the spirit of prophecy. YHWH's promise of the land to the Hebrew nation was nowhere mentioned. This absence is striking, considering the development of modern Zionism which, at the time of Buber's article, was actively reasserting the validity of that divine and eternal legacy. Buber himself had had a long and checkered involvement with the Zionist renaissance. By settling in Palestine he had personally enacted the truth of the blessing of his patriarch. Given this personal and collective involvement in the controversial return to the land of the Fathers, the lack of emphasis on the divine right to the land requires an explanation.

To understand Buber's position we need to trace the development of his Zionism. He came to it as a young man of twenty, after a period of relative denial of his Jewishness in his college days in Vienna, and embraced it with the passion of a convert who saw in this ideal a solution

to his own problems of Jewish identity and purpose. He worked under his fellow Viennese, Herzl, editing the Zionist journal *Die Welt* until Herzl's death in 1904. In that year Buber completed his doctoral thesis on German Mysticism, discovered the writings of the Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Hasidism, and quit the official Zionist organization. Under the influence of Aḥad Ha'am, Buber saw Zionism as a cultural and spiritual reawakening of the Jewish nation and not primarily as a political program for the Jewish state. Frustrated and disillusioned by the emphasis on diplomacy and *realpolitik*, he left his post in order to explore the Hasidic philosophy and experience.

During the First World War, while he was gradually evolving the ideas which would culminate in *Ich und Du* (1923), he regained interest in the Jewish settlement in Palestine, and was part of the socialist Zionist circle concerned especially with the development of the kibbutz movement. In 1921, following the Arab rioting, he argued for the practical and spiritual necessity of cooperation between autonomous Arab and Jewish communities, but his views were largely ignored, both then and in 1929, when he once more abandoned political Zionism and devoted himself to adult Jewish education.

Ten years later, when the article on Abraham was published, Buber was again active in the League for Jewish-Arab Rapprochement and Cooperation, which opposed mainstream Zionism as led by Ben Gurion, and which demanded a Jewish State. Instead, the League called for an Arab-Jewish bi-national State and, in March of 1939, published a collection of statements on the problems of Zionist policy and Jewish-Arab cooperation entitled "At the Crossing of the Way," to which Buber contributed a history of the Arab problem. Idealistically, he claimed that there were no basic differences between the interests of the Arab fellahin and the Jewish colonist, and he blamed Zionist intransigence and insensitivity for the mutual hostility and the riots of 1936-39. In October of 1939, he and other members of the League had a confrontation with Ben Gurion, but to little avail. After World War II, Buber, Magnes and others, as part of the "Iḥud" (Unity), appeared before the Commission of Inquiry and published further essays on Arab-Jewish cooperation.

In all of this, Buber never overtly denied the divine promise of the land; to do so would have challenged his own presence in Palestine and the right of Jews, in general, to dwell there. But because Ben Gurion and the official Zionist organization emphasized the historic right of Jews to the land in order to support their political claim to it, Buber was placed on the defensive. In *Paths to Utopia* he suggested that the Jewish presence in Palestine was justified, not so much by divine decree, as by the historical memory of the land as a center of Jewish religious experience, or by the creation of model communities which would become a blessing for all mankind. In fact, these glaring omissions — the divine right to the land and the rejection of Ishmael — may even seem to have the nature of

avoidances. The notion of divine right was clearly related to Buber's personal psychological trauma and the psycho-historical trauma of German Jews fleeing to their Palestinian homeland to escape Nazism. It is perhaps significant, as regards his suppression of Ishmael, to note that Buber was, himself, an abandoned son. He was abandoned by his father at the age of three; his mother also abandoned him at that time and he never saw her again until thirty years later. In reminiscing about his childhood⁷ he recounts a touching moment when he realized, with the help of an older companion, a girl of five, that his mother would never return. This, incidentally, may also explain why Buber speaks so little, and with so little sympathy, of Sarah. Out of his early childhood experience he might, therefore, naturally identify with the abandoned Ishmael.

However, though he was a close student of the biblical text and a very vocal advocate of unity between Jew and Arab, Buber overlooked a biblical hint of possible unity between the sons of Ishmael and the sons of Yizhak. Although the whole land is promised to Abraham after the *akedah*, only the cities are promised to Yizhak. The narrative seems to indicate that Abraham, as a prosperous herdsman, was well established in the rural areas and looked on the fortified cities with some fear or misgivings. The text can be interpreted as suggesting that the sons of Yizhak and Israel would inherit the cities, whereas the countryside would remain the possession of Ishmael's seed.

We might also note, in passing, that Buber had a special sympathy for Hagar, Ishmael's mother. He points out that she is the first person in Scripture to be sought out by a messenger of the Lord. She also calls upon the Lord, using a new name, the "God of Seeing," thus corroborating the importance of the motif of "seeing." Typically, Buber's regard for Hagar contrasts with Rabbinical tradition which generally denigrates the Egyptian slave in an effort to justify Sarah's actions.

Buber also omits all mention of Abraham's life after the *akedah*, even though he lived for another sixty biblical years, a full third of his life. In Buber's view, Abraham was fully reconciled with YHWH at the *akedah*. His spiritual development was completed and no further revelations were necessary. Since, as we have seen, Buber was interested above all else in the origins and the intimacy of the relationship between man and his God, the last sixty years of Abraham's life involve only dealings with men and, as such, were of little interest to him.

Buber As Survivor

In Buber's life there are two readily identifiable sources of possible survivor-guilt which might have contributed to his special empathy with Abraham. The first is that he outlived his friend and co-worker Franz

7. Martin Buber, *Meetings*, ed. and tr., with an introduction and bibliography by Maurice Friedman (LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court Publishing Co., 1973).

Rosenzweig. Both of them had had a profound religious transformation during the First Great War; they shared a common belief in the ultimate validity of the actual individual human encounter with the divine; and they had a passionate commitment to Jewish education. Each had developed a creative resolution to Jewish spiritual questions in their respective masterpieces: *I and Thou* and *Star of Redemption*. Together, they collaborated on a new German translation of the Hebrew Bible, faithful to the spirit and style of the original. This great enterprise was interrupted by Rosenzweig's death in 1929.

Six years earlier, in 1923, Rosenzweig had been appointed to the first Chair of Jewish Religious Thought at the University of Frankfurt but was unable to accept because of a degenerative paralysis. Buber was persuaded to take his close friend's place, thereby initiating what later became a full-blown sense of survivor-guilt. Rosenzweig, unable to speak or move, nevertheless worked intensely with Buber on the translation, and they finished through the Book of Isaiah.

After Rosenzweig's death, Buber actively carried on his friend's work. In 1933, when the Nazis came to power he revived the *Lehrhaus* which Rosenzweig had founded. He worked hard at popularizing his friend's writings, believing them to be unique works of purity and enlightenment, works of the future, for the future. He also continued the work on the translation, which was finally published in 1963, and, at the time of his own death, Buber was still working on further refinements of the text. To have stopped work on the Bible would have meant breaking faith with his friend who had died in the process of giving new life to the German version of the Torah. Buber's essay on Abraham and all of his writings on the Bible grew out of, were inspired, even driven, by the influence and memory of his departed comrade.

This sense of survivor-guilt was, of course, further heightened by the events in Germany after the Nazis came to power. Buber's biblical writings took place at a turning point in the history of the Hebrew nation. In 1938-39, when the study of Abraham appeared, two decisive incidents were imminent: the mass murder of European Jewry and the creation of the Jewish state of Israel. These two crises were linked by a collective survivors' mission: the homeland was to serve as a place of refuge for all Jews, but, especially, for victims of Nazi oppression. In political retrospect, the State of Israel grew out of the smoke and ashes of Auschwitz and Buchenwald, and the United Nations granted recognition in part out of guilt at what had happened to six million Jews. Jewish refugees like Buber, as well as native-born Israelis, could believe that they had survived while others died in order to participate in the Jewish rebirth of Israel. Israel, rising like the proverbial phoenix out of the ashes of its own dead, served to confirm the biblical sense of destiny of the descendants of Abraham.

Buber's own journey from Germany to Palestine paralleled the passage in the life of the Hebrew nation from exile to Zion. He had delayed

leaving the Third Reich in order to offer spiritual resistance to the Nazi regime. He organized training programs for Jewish students who were barred from German schools, he lectured on Judaism and tried to maintain and uplift the spiritual resources of the German-Jewish community even after Jewish organization was forbidden. The publication of his study of Abraham was the final act of his spiritual war with the Nazis.

Since he had taken on himself the task of preserving Jewish learning and culture in the midst of the period of great anti-Jewish oppression, his departure at the time of the Nazi takeover of his native Vienna was accomplished with a lingering sense of failure, though his sorrow was somewhat tempered by the sense of fulfillment in participating in the Jewish communal experiment and spiritual revival in Palestine.

Buber's Concept of God

Buber repeatedly insisted that the living God, the God of biblical faith and religious experience with whom he was concerned, cannot — despite what many theologians seem to think — be described or defined. He can only be encountered: “If to believe in God means to be able to talk about him in the third person, then I do not believe in God. If to believe in him means to be able to talk to him, then I believe in God.”⁸ Buber’s theology was based on the notion of a universal spiritual Being willing to enter into personal intimate human dialogue. He held that divine righteousness “desires to continue its operation in a human righteousness, and that man’s fate depends on whether he submits to this will or denies it.”⁹ In *I and Thou* he explained that “divine revelation cannot be preserved but only put to the proof in action” (p. 163). The divine decision to extend the level of intimacy and dialogue was, for Buber, rightly based on action, doing justice on earth as it is done in heaven.

This credo is based on the principle of the continuing prophetic tradition, first illustrated in Genesis. The God whom Abraham addressed was understood to be the same one who spoke to his son and grandson. None of these three asked about God’s essence, as did Moses, who recovered the tradition of revelation four generations later. Because the intense religious encounter took place within an ongoing Hebrew tradition, the divine agent in each case could be identified with the God of Abraham. Unlike the God of the philosophers who persists out of logical necessity, the God of Abraham persists out of a collective human necessity. Each member of that tradition may, like Yizhak, Jacob or Moses, believe that his unique religious encounter with Spiritual Being is also a re-enactment of the historical encounter between the God of Abraham and of Hebrews of every subsequent generation.

8. Buber, *Meetings*, p. 44.

9. Martin Buber, *The Prophetic Faith*, tr. C. Witton-Davies (New York: Macmillan and Co., 1949), p. 102.

Conclusion

In his play, *Elijah*, Buber showed that there are times — as perhaps there was for him in 1938-39 — when there is no appropriate or adequate response to the dilemmas of life:

Elijah: Nothing is given me to say now.

Elishah: They want to know what they must do.

Elijah: Nothing is given to us to do now.

Elishah: Nothing? You speak the word — Nothing!

Elijah: Nothing other than just this is given to us to know.

Buber, who identified with Elijah, “the free prophet,” wrote his piece on Abraham in a similar prophetic calm. He could no longer combat Nazi oppression directly, he could not even continue his spiritual resistance. But he could point clearly and emphatically to exactly what it meant to be a Hebrew, living with Abraham’s God and mission.

I point to things (he wrote): I point out what a person has not seen at all, or seen but not sufficiently. I take him who hears me by the hand and lead him to the window. I open the window wide and point outside.¹⁰

He added that “He who hopes for a teaching from me that is anything other than a pointing of this sort will always be disappointed.”¹¹ In Buber’s writings much of what is most significant cannot be put into words but can only be hinted at. Indeed, at the end of the piece on Abraham, the reader is explicitly asked “to read between the lines.” Buber shared this doctrine of the supreme importance of the ineffable with many of his mystic predecessors. What he succeeded in pointing out most clearly was the intimacy and importance of the intense encounter between Abraham and his God.

10. Paul Arthur Schilpp and Maurice Friedman, *Begegnung* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1960), p. 615.

11. Buber, *Meetings*, pp. 4-5.

Martin Buber's Influence on Twentieth Century Religious Thought

MAURICE FRIEDMAN

MARTIN BUBER'S INFLUENCE — WHETHER direct or indirect — on the religious thought of this century has been enormous and incalculable, and to try to document it in all of the modes that it has manifested itself in would be an impossible task. However, what we can do here is to discuss the basic directions that it has taken and, within each one, something of the stages of that influence, since Buber's impact when he was alive spread itself over almost seventy years and has continued in the twenty years since his death.

Thirty years ago, in *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue*, I assessed that influence in terms which may seem to many today (and perhaps seemed to many then) an overstatement:

Ludwig Lewisohn, writing in 1935, said:

Dr. Buber is the most distinguished and influential of living Jewish thinkers. . . . We are all his pupils. The contemporary reintegration of modern Western Jewish writers, thinkers, scientists, with their people, is unthinkable without the work and voice of Martin Buber.

No Jewish thinker has had a greater cultural, intellectual, and religious influence than has Buber in the last four decades. He is of significance for Judaism not only as religious philosopher, translator of the Bible, and translator and re-creator of Hasidic legends and thought, but also as a religious personality who has provided leadership of a rare quality during the time of his people's greatest trial and suffering since the beginning of the diaspora. Since the death of Hermann Cohen, Buber has been generally acknowledged as the representative figure of Western European Jewry. He wielded a tremendous influence not only upon the youth won over to Zionism but also upon the Liberals, and even, despite his non-adherence to the Jewish Law, upon the Orthodox. "It was Buber," writes Alfred Werner, "to whom I (like thousands of Central European men and women devoid of any Jewish background) owe my initiation into the realm of Jewish culture."

Today, in the third generation of his writing, speaking, and teaching, Martin Buber is without question not only the representative figure of Western European Jewry but of world Jewry as well. No one has done more than he to bring about a rebirth of Judaism, and his works promise to affect generations of thinking religious Jews of the future. The steady spread of his influence from Europe to England and from Israel to America makes it

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clear that this is no temporary phenomenon but a deep-seated force in the life and destiny of the Jewish people.¹

Since I wrote those words Buber's star rose decisively in America and then, in the last ten or fifteen years, has been somewhat on the decline though his influence has continued to radiate out from his many books and from those whom he influenced.

Judaism

A truly momentous encounter took place in 1909 and in the years following between the remarkable group of young Zionists who formed the Bar Kochba Union in Prague and Martin Buber, who emerged from several years of self-imposed retirement with a stature and dignity that made men only ten years his junior look up to him as a leader and a sage. The early heroic epoch of the Prague Bar Kochbans had been characterized by the will to make the impossible possible, a new spirit that willed to bring Jewishness to realization and to make one's personal and one's political life a single unity. After Herzl's death, the Prague Bar Kochbans fell into stagnation until Buber's famous "Speeches on Judaism" ushered in a new era for them and, radiating out from there, for central European Zionist youth in general. The Prague Bar Kochbans became Buber's community, and from it emerged some of his most influential disciples and lasting friends, men such as Hugo Bergman, Max Brod, Robert and Felix Weltsch, and Hans Kohn.

In these "Speeches on Judaism" Buber turned the "Jewish Question" from an abstraction about whether Jews are to be considered members of a race, nation, or creed to what is the deepest personal meaning of Judaism to the Jew himself. Although the Western Jew is a divided person because his community of land, speech, and custom is different from his community of blood, the blood is the deepest level which, in every hour, determines the tone of our lives. To be the master rather than the slave of this mixture means to say Yes to one's Jewish existence and to feel the people in oneself. The basic tendencies of Judaism — the striving for unity, deed, and future — are the elements out of which a new world will be constructed so that "our soul's deepest humanity and our soul's deepest Judaism mean and will be the same thing." In 1916, Ludwig Strauss wrote to Buber, in response to the second set of three "Speeches on Judaism," that its message had influenced the atmosphere of their lives so much that even a young Jew, who did not know it, would receive something of its glance of freedom, just as the intellectual youth of Germany were influenced by the spirit of Nietzsche, often without knowing his works well. When Franz Rosenzweig reread the "Speeches" after all of them (ranging from 1909 to 1919) had been collected in one volume, he

1. Maurice S. Friedman, *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue*, 3rd rev. ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press Phoenix Books, 1976).

wrote to Buber: "I am amazed to see to what degree you have become the representative speaker and the advocate of our generations, mine as well as the one after me."

I know of no other book about Judaism during those years that even approaches the influence" of Buber's *Speeches on Judaism*, Gershom Scholem wrote in 1966, a year after their author's death. "No one performed greater service than Buber in making visible again precisely those traits in Judaism which were . . . actively rejected in nineteenth-century Judaism — mysticism and myth." "Buber was the first Jewish thinker," wrote Scholem, "who saw in mysticism a basic trait and continuing strain of Judaism." The tremendous appeal of the "Speeches" nonetheless, was not so much a mystical as an existential one — their personal appeal to the Jew as an individual to decide to join his people — and it was precisely this existential appeal which spread from Bohemia to Galicia to Hungary. "Buber's real influence started with the 'Speeches'," writes Ernst Simon. Buber was a middleman addressing others who also stood between Eastern and Western Jewry, between the masses of traditional Jews and deteriorating Judaism, between a continuous heritage and the loss of all traditional values.

In 1913, it was Buber's book, *Daniel: Dialogues on Realization*, that supplied the philosophical background for the emphasis on "realization" in the "Speeches." The contrast between "orienting" and "realizing" that stands at the heart of *Daniel* had almost a more lasting effect on the world view of the Bar Kochbans of that time than did Buber's Jewish writings. It was written in Buber's second period of fame, Ernst Simon points out, his first being the period of his first two books on Hasidism, *The Tales of Rabbi Nachman* (1906) and *The Legend of the Baal-Shem* (1907). From this point onward, Buber's influence developed in two separate streams which had a common origin but were distinct along most of the way — his Jewish writings and his general philosophy. *Daniel* was a hard-won and crucial step toward that philosophy of dialogue through which, in its many ramifications, Buber was to exercise his most profound, widespread, and lasting influence.

Before we turn to this general philosophy, as expressed in *I and Thou*, we must look at two more aspects of Buber's influence on Judaism — his editorship of *Der Jude* and his Zionist socialism. In 1916, in the midst of the First World War, he founded the monthly journal, *Der Jude* ("The Jew"), which became the central point for the higher spiritual strivings of the Zionist movement. He had already, in his twenties, associated himself with Theodor Herzl and had been the editor of the official Zionist journal, *Die Welt*. With Chaim Weizmann he had led the "Democratic Fraction" that demanded a cultural, as opposed to a purely political, Zionism. Even after he ceased to edit *Der Jude*, in 1924, Buber remained an active force in Zionism, leading Adolf Böhm, the historian of the Zionist movement before the state of Israel, to declare that in the whole sphere of Zion-

ist activity, even that of political activity, it was Buber's disciples who accomplished what was essential.

As a result of its high level, *Der Jude* became the leading organ of German-speaking Jewry, and the best of Jewish writers and thinkers and a number of non-Jews, Ernst Simon testifies, saw it as a great honor to participate in it. This applied to both Zionists and non-Zionists, writers in German, Yiddish, and Hebrew. It thus fulfilled, on the highest level, a national Jewish task encompassing many countries. Its scope was broad yet centered in Zionism as Buber saw it, and its influence was very great almost from the first moment. Even an anti-Zionist like Franz Rosenzweig wrote to his parents that it was becoming the only organ of German Jewry which could be taken seriously. For seven years Buber tried to influence the Zionist movement through *Der Jude*, fighting for its organic tie with the Jewish nation all over the Diaspora, for its progressive social and political character. A Jewish life can be only the life of a *community*, he stressed. Those who try to secure a homeland in Palestine will not have it unless, in all their actions, they guard the responsibility to found a pure and just human life together.

In 1918, Viktor Jacobson, a leading practical Zionist, wrote to Buber criticizing the independent attitude of Nahum Goldmann, later to become the head of the World Jewish Agency. In defending young Goldmann, Buber wrote:

Der Jude is no party organ and will have a greater impact on the young — its most important circle of readers — the more thoroughly its innermost independence becomes manifest.

Many of the Jews who went to Palestine after the First World War were motivated by the desire to build a new community, a large number of them because of Buber's influence. Buber's idea of the realization of community contributed to the rise of the *Haluz*, or pioneer, movement after the First World War, and to the beginnings of so-called Labor Zionism. In his conception of Zionist socialism and "revolutionary colonization" Buber's thought converged at many points with the community of workers of the land that had arisen in Palestine as the Young Workers, *Hapoël Hazaïr*, and with its leader, the labor philosopher and pioneer, A.D. Gordon.

I and Thou

Buber's central philosophical work, *I and Thou* (1923), is universally recognized as a classic. It is, without doubt, one of the most influential books of this century — not only in religion but in human life in general and in such fields as psychology, education, ethics, and social philosophy in particular. The British theologian, J.H. Oldham said of it:

I question whether any book has been published in the present century the

message of which, if it were understood and heeded, would have such far-reaching consequences for the life of our time.

In this connection Oldham singles out "the realization of the crucial significance of relations between persons, and of the fundamentally *social* nature of reality" as central to *I and Thou*. Another English theologian, Herbert H. Farmer, has spoken of the central concept of *I and Thou* as the most important contribution given to us in recent years toward the reflective grasp of our faith. "The whole conception of spirit," writes the Anglo-Catholic theologian, J.E. Fison, "points to that between-ness in which Buber sees the essential meaning of life."

When Buber wrote the final version of *I and Thou*, he was fully immersed in Jewish education and Jewish spiritual concerns. Despite this and the fact that *I and Thou* is unthinkable without the wisdom of Hasidism and of the Hebrew Bible, it is, in its form and its intent, a universal book. It was clearly necessary for Buber to attain the major breakthrough to this classic universal statement before he could go forward (not back) to the more particular work on Hasidism and the translation and interpretation of the Hebrew Bible that occupied so much of the rest of his life. When a biblical scholar asked Buber, in his last years, whether he regarded his biblical studies and his translation of the Bible from Hebrew into German as the quintessence of his lifework, he replied:

If I myself should designate something as the "central portion of my life work," then it could not be anything individual, but only the one basic insight that has led me not only to the study of the Bible, as to the study of Hasidism, but also to an independent philosophical presentation: that the I-Thou relation to God and the I-Thou relation to one's fellow man are at bottom related to each other. This being related to each other is . . . the central portion of the dialogical reality that has ever more disclosed itself to me.²

In *I and Thou* Buber made manifest that duality of the primal words I-Thou (openness, directness, mutuality) and I-It (the typical subject-object relation of knowing, categorizing, and using) as "the basic relationship in the life of each man with all existing being." Buber's philosophizing in *I and Thou* was essentially an anthropological one, with the question of how man is possible as its central theme. His task was not to expound a doctrine but to point to a reality: "I have no teaching," he testified, "but I carry on a conversation." "No system was suitable for what I had to say. Structure was suitable for it, a compact structure but not one that joined everything together."

I and Thou, as Werner Kraft says, has the compelling quality of all great "breakthrough" writings. What Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra* was to the nineteenth century, *I and Thou* has been, and is, for the twentieth.

2. "Martin Buber Interrogations," conducted, ed., & Buber's replies trans. by Maurice Friedman in Sydney & Beatrice Rome, eds., *Philosophical Interrogations* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1964), p. 99 f.

eth, no less because of the way in which it was written as because of the ideas it contains.

The Hebrew Bible

Two years after the publication of *I and Thou*, Buber, in cooperation with the totally paralyzed Franz Rosenzweig, began the task that occupied him right up until his death in 1965 — the translation of the Hebrew Bible into German in such a way as to preserve the spoken quality and the metaphoric power of the Hebrew original. Whereas Moses Mendelssohn made his translation as German as possible in order to teach German to the German Jews, Buber and Rosenzweig made theirs as Hebrew as possible in order to bring the German Jews back to the original text. The translation was also intended to reach and teach the German Christians and to combat the German Christian anti-Semitism that wanted to dispense with the “Old Testament” altogether. Today the translation has, indeed, a considerable impact on German Christians, and it serves as a commentary for many Jews in Israel and elsewhere who understand both German and the Hebrew original.

The Buber-Rosenzweig Bible came as both the supreme cultural achievement and the termination of what Buber himself called the German-Jewish symbiosis. Ernest M. Wolf, like Gershom Scholem and Ernst Simon, testified to its great importance for Jewish youth both as a substitute for the original and as a favorite commentary, or *targum*, on it. It gave a solid foundation to the renaissance of Jewish learning that had been stirring from the early years of the century, and “regular and systematic courses in Bible study became one of the major forms of educational endeavor in the Jewish community.”

There was hardly a meeting, a seminar, a conference, or a camp of Jewish youth organizations where Bible study was not part of the program, and usually a major and central part of it. . . . Had the generation of young Jews that went through the Buber-Rosenzweig school of Bible reading and Bible interpreting been permitted to grow up and to remain together, they would probably have become the most Bible-conscious Jews since the days before the ghetto-walls had fallen in Europe.³

The Buber-Rosenzweig Bible translation “has been universally acclaimed as a miracle of fidelity and beauty,” wrote the Germanicist Solomon Liptzin, in a book on refugees from Nazi Germany. The great German-Swiss novelist and poet, Hermann Hesse, wrote in three separate places, “I must also name the Bible translation of Martin Buber, with the sincerity and strictness of its struggling for the word, one of the noblest strivings of the German spirit in our time.” Benno Jacob, himself an eminent scholar and translator of the Hebrew Bible, wrote:

3. Ernest M. Wolf, “Martin Buber and German Jewry,” *JUDAISM*, I, 4 (October 1952): 349 f.

It is an epoch making accomplishment which . . . may stand of equal rank beside Luther's translation of the Bible. . . . I know no translation which so very much replaces the original and yet so very much presses one to learn the original itself.

The great Christian Bible scholar, Alfred Jeremias, wrote to Buber that he saw the translation as a "pneumatic" rendering out of the depth of Jewish spiritual life, the mysticism of the everyday, the hallowing of the profane, hence out of Jewish, as opposed to Christian, messianism.

Ernst Simon has singled out three interconnected characteristics that distinguish this Bible translation from all others: the oral element, the sensual element, and the maximum preservation of the Hebrew form of speech in a foreign idiom through which, in Buber's own words, the Bible was liberated from the "plague of familiarity."

Do we mean a book? (wrote Buber). We mean the voice. . . . We mean that one shall learn to hear. . . . We wish to break through to the spokenness of the Word, to its having been spoken. The Bible is to be read *in living Presence*.

Along with the translation of the Hebrew Bible went a series of interpretations — *The Kingship of God*, *Moses*, *The Prophetic Faith* — in which Buber traced the development of the Messianic idea. Commenting on *The Kingship of God*, Ludwig Feuchtwanger, biblical scholar and critic, wrote: "For the first time there has arisen a real Jewish critical study of the Bible — Jewish and critical at once — which does not allow its way to be dictated to it by foreign tendencies." The great Protestant theologian, Emil Brunner, acclaimed *The Kingship of God* as the first book about the Old Testament to be written out of understanding and not out of misunderstanding, the first to break through "the comfortless schematism of objectivizing history with its evolutionary waltz which flattens everything to the same level." In his later book, *Man in Revolt*, Brunner declared that Buber's *Kingship of God* contains more real philosophy of history than any book on that subject. Leo Baeck wrote that here text and commentary are one and saw the book as providing a new direction while Hugo Hahn, a leading German rabbi, wrote to Buber that it would call forth a whole new Bible generation and that every young theologian would need to read it again and again. Gershom Scholem said that the principles to which Buber had given a concrete application in *The Kingship of God* opened up a wholly new line of Bible scholarship, the significance of which for every level of Jewish reality was incalculable.

"You have simply *read* without adding anything to the text," Eduard Strauss wrote to Buber in 1947 about *Moses*, the next book of biblical interpretation that he wrote. "It is a book that speaks, that teaches one to *read* until suddenly one *hears* the Voice." In 1949, Max Brod wrote to Buber that what he said in *Moses* "is simply *the* right, *the* true — equally far from skepticism, from literal belief, and from pseudocriticism." A dozen years later Brod characterized *Moses* as "the most penetratingly expressive" of

Buber's books, the one "which of all his exegetical works is most clearly illumined by the radiance of poetry," a quality which, unfortunately, does not come through in the translation.

The Prophetic Faith completed and crowned Buber's years of concern for the origin of messianism in the Bible, and in many ways it is his most impressive book of biblical exegesis. In it he resumes the thesis of *The Kingship of God* that there can be no split between the "religious" and the "social," that Israel cannot become the people of YHVH without a just faith between human beings. "The God of the universe is the God of history." He is the deity who walks with his creature and with his people along the hard way of history, the "God Who hides Himself" (Isaiah 45:15) but, also, the God of history who reveals Himself. The Messiah of Isaiah is not a divine figure who takes the place of man's turning but the one who leads those in Israel who have remained faithful to the covenant to turn to God and serve as the beginning of his kingdom. Similarly, the "suffering servant" of Deutero-Isaiah is neither Israel nor Jesus but a personal being who takes shape through many generations and who completes the work of the judges and the prophets, the work of making real God's kingship over the people.

Only a viewpoint that is Biblical in a very profound sense (wrote the eminent Old Testament scholar, J. Coert Rylaarsdam, of *The Prophetic Faith*), could so consistently illuminate every part of the Bible it touches. Professor Buber is in a unique way the agent through whom, in our day, Judaism and Christianity have met and enriched one another.

James Muilenburg, another distinguished biblical scholar, particularly appreciated three elements in *The Prophetic Faith*: Buber's insistence that the literary and religious development of a tradition may be widely separate in time, the exposition of the prophets, and the author's understanding of nature worship and the hold which it exerts on its devotees. The German man of letters, Ewald Wasmuth, wrote to Buber in 1951 that he could imagine people losing touch with the Bible for some centuries and then someone reading *The Prophetic Faith* and finding in it such power that he would seek again the sources, "and the breath of God would return into a godless world."

Buber's less known but nonetheless important "mystery play," *Elijah*, contains in dramatic form all of the central motifs in Buber's understanding of biblical and Jewish existence: the demand which the covenant with Israel places on the people and the king to make real the kingship of God through justice, righteousness, and loving-kindness; the task of building the covenant of peace with other nations and of building true community; the attack on all forms of dualism that relegate religion to the cultic and the "spiritual" and place no demand on everyday life; the biblical *emunah*, or unconditional trust in the relation to the imageless God who offers no security or success yet who will be with us as he will be with us; the summons and sending of the prophet to whom God calls but whom he does

not compel; the call of the prophet for real decision in the present — the people's turning back to God with the whole of their existence — rather than the apocalyptic prediction of a fixed future; evil as the failure to make real decision; the king as the viceroy of God who is anointed to God's realized kingship but who has no "divine right" to rule in God's stead; the "suffering servant" as the messianic figure who will lead the "holy remnant" of those who remain faithful to the covenant to set the dialogue right through free and wholehearted response.⁴

Hasidism

"Buber's discovery of Hasidism was epochal for the West," wrote Robert Weltsch. "Buber made his thesis believable that no renewal of Judaism would be possible which did not bear in itself elements of Hasidism." Through this discovery Buber opened up important new aspects of Jewish experience to the Jews of Western Europe and, at the same time, helped bridge the growing gap between them and the Jews of Eastern Europe, becoming, in Ernest Wolf's words the "living symbol" as well as the "finest flower" of the two traditions. To speak of Buber's "discovery of Hasidism" is not to speak of Hasidism as a world that was unknown to the West before Buber, but of a meaningful encounter with it that made it, for the first time, of major significance to the Western world, both Jewish and non-Jewish. Until the turn of the century, Hasidism was largely regarded by those who knew about it at all in the West as a form of crude popular superstition, perhaps of interest as a revival movement, but of no intrinsic value within the stream of Judaism and positively at odds with the whole spirit of the Jewish Enlightenment and of the modern Science of Judaism.

Buber's first presentation of Hasidism was in the form of long stories and legends (*The Tales of Rabbi Nachman* and *The Legend of the Baal-Shem*). Technical criticism of his retelling of the Hasidic legends is beside the point, wrote Ludwig Lewisohn.

These legends will remain a permanent possession of mankind in the form he has given them by virtue of that form which has itself become a part of their message and meaning.

In his first Hasidic books Buber exercised a great deal of freedom in the retelling of the legends in the belief that this was the best way to get at the essence of the Hasidic spirit, but in 1921 he rejected this method of translating on the grounds that it was "too free." His later tales, accordingly, are closely faithful to the simple and rough originals and often are fragmentary sayings and anecdotes rather than complete stories. In his Hasidic chronicle-novel, *For the Sake of Heaven* ("Gog and Magog"), cen-

4. *Elijah* is published in English translation in *Martin Buber and the Theater*, ed. & trans. with Three Introductory Essays by Maurice Friedman (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1969), Part III, pp. 95-164.

tered around the conflict between the Seer of Lublin and his disciple, the "holy Yehudi," Buber discovered how to combine freedom and faithfulness to the spirit of the tales. Buber told me that he regarded *For the Sake of Heaven* as his most important book. By this he did not mean the most influential or the most culturally significant one, but the one in which his heart had found its fullest and most significant expression in response to the world in which he lived.

The Hungarian classicist and authority on myth, Karl Kerényi, singled out *For the Sake of Heaven* as the work which won for Buber a secure place in the ranks of classical authors, in the deepest sense of the term. According to Kerényi, *For the Sake of Heaven* stands on the peak of epic prose next to such masterworks as Thomas Mann's *The Holy Sinner* and Pär Lagerkvist's *Barabbas*. Buber's great achievement in his Hasidic chronicle-novel

is the evocation of fighters of the spirit who are without comparison in the whole of epic world literature in the ardor and exclusiveness of the unfolding of their religious powers.

Although highly critical of his faithfulness to the Hasidic sources, Rivka Schatz-Uffenheimer, a disciple of Scholem's, concluded a long discussion of *For the Sake of Heaven* with the statement:

Every conversation in *For the Sake of Heaven* is a chapter of life in the spiritual world of Hasidism, a chapter sifted free of all banality and sentimentality, all of it polished by the masterful use of adumbration, so that if you have not read it several times, you have not read it at all. Here we are taught by Buber how man should face the world and God.⁵

The two volumes of *The Tales of the Hasidim* (*The Early Masters* and *The Later Masters*) which were published originally in Hebrew in 1946 under the title, *Or Hagganuz*, and later in German, English, French and many other languages, crown Buber's lifetime of retelling Hasidic legends and stories. In a letter that Hermann Hesse wrote to a friend explaining his nomination of Buber for the Nobel Prize in Literature, it was to *The Tales of the Hasidim* in particular that he pointed:

Martin Buber is in my judgment not only one of the few wise men who live on the earth at the present time, he is also a writer of a very high order, and, more than that, he has enriched world literature with a genuine treasure as has no other living author — *The Tales of the Hasidim*. . . . Martin Buber . . . is the worthiest spiritual representative of Israel, the people that has had to suffer the most of all people in our time.⁶

Rudolf Pannwitz informed Buber that he found in *The Tales of the Hasidim* "something conclusive: the canon of a religion." In his contribution to *The*

5. Rivka Schatz-Uffenheimer, "Man's Relation to God and World in Buber's Rendering of the Hasidic Teaching" in Paul Arthur Schilpp and Maurice Friedman, eds., *The Philosophy of Martin Buber*, The Library of Living Philosophers (LaSalle, Ill: The Open Court Publishing Co., 1967), p. 434.

6. Hermann Hesse, *Briefe*, Vol. III of *Gesammelte Werke* (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1951), pp. 266, 324 ff.

Philosophy of Martin Buber, Walter Kaufmann wrote of Buber's *Tales* that they are definitive in their simplicity, comparing them favorably in this respect to the art of any of the four gospels:

What saves Buber's work is its perfection. He has given us one of the great religious books of all time, a work that invites comparison with the great Scriptures of mankind. . . . The rank of these works does not depend on their positivistic accuracy but on their profundity. And that is true also of *The Tales of the Hasidim*. . . . Here is religion that stands up to philosophic questions as the sophisticated discourses of theologians don't. . . . These stories will surely be remembered widely when the theologians of our time have gone the way of Harnack and Schleiermacher.⁷

Perhaps the real apex of all Buber's Hasidic writings is *The Way of Man. According to the Teaching of the Hasidim* (1948). In 1948, Hermann Hesse wrote to Buber that *The Way of Man* "is probably the most beautiful of your works that I have read." It is, wrote Gershom Scholem, "not only a gem of literature but also an extraordinary lesson in religious anthropology, presented in the language of Hasidism and inspired by a large number of authentic Hasidic sayings." *The Way of Man* is an entirely different kind of work from any of its author's other Hasidic writings. It consists of six sections, each in the form of a commentary on a Hasidic tale, supplemented by other tales and sayings. Yet it is far more than a mere interpretation or summary of Hasidic teaching. No other of Buber's works gives us so much of his own simple wisdom as does this remarkable distillation. Although barely fifty pages long, it ranks with *I and Thou*, *For the Sake of Heaven*, and *The Tales of the Hasidim* as one of his great and enduring classics.

Buber's work on Hasidism has been put into question because of the attack by Gershom Scholem and his disciple, Rivka Schatz-Uffenheimer, who claim that he has read his own "religious anarchism" and existential philosophy into his interpretation of Hasidism and has ignored the Gnostic element of "nullification" of the particular for the sake of contact with the Transcendent. However, in contrast to Zen Buddhism, which Buber interprets as concerned with the particulars only as a symbol of the absolute, Buber holds that in Hasidism the things themselves do matter, for it is a mysticism in which time is hallowed. Scholem and Schatz-Uffenheimer see nothing of this "hallowing of the everyday" in the thousands of theoretical pages of Hasidism, and they deny Buber's right to base his interpretation of Hasidism on the legends. The Hasidim were interested in the particular only to nullify it.

Buber's reply to this, which Scholem did not respond to, is that there were two streams within Hasidism — one that of the founder, the Baal Shem Tov, in which the hallowing of the everyday for its own sake is emphasized; the other, that of his great disciple, the Maggid of Mezritch,

7. Walter Kaufmann, "Martin Buber's Religious Significance" in Paul Arthur Schilpp and Maurice Friedman, eds., *The Philosophy of Martin Buber*, p. 680 f.

in which the particular is of importance primarily as a stage of a dialectical process in which it is finally nullified in order to reach the transcendent. Buber's contention receives strong support in Abraham Joshua Heschel's posthumous book, *The Circle of the Baal Shem*,⁸ which shows this very conflict as taking place between the Maggid of Mezritch and his followers, on the one side, and Pinhas of Koretz, on the other, both claiming to continue the true teachings of the Besht, and both stretching on for generations.

In his writings on Hasidism, with the exception of *For the Sake of Heaven*, Buber did not emphasize the second, Gnostic stream. Herein, Scholem's criticism is partially justified, for many people in the Western world took their understanding of Hasidism from Buber's interpretation. What is not justified is that after his chapter on "Hasidism" in *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, which agrees in all central respects with Buber, Scholem fails to acknowledge that the first stream, of hallowing the everyday, exists at all. Instead, he urges his readers to dismiss Buber's interpretation of Hasidism as entirely invalid.⁹

Because of Scholem's great scholarly reputation, many people have uncritically accepted his one-sided criticism of Buber's Hasidic teaching, with the result that Buber's influence on religious thinking in this area has somewhat declined. In the most extreme case the noted literary critic, Harold Bloom, a former Buberian and now a Gnostic Scholemite, has turned against Buber almost altogether, with the exception of *The Prophetic Faith*, which he still sees as unexcelled biblical literary interpretation. "If Scholem was Joshua, Buber was Moses," Walter Kaufmann remarked concerning the Buber-Scholem controversy in the midst of an otherwise fairly critical assessment at the Buber Centennial Conferences in Israel and America. The value of Scholem's scholarly contributions for the generations to come is incontestable, but if anything in this analogy could be regarded by Jew and non-Jew alike as "the Promised Land," it would not be Scholem's destruction of the Jericho walls of all previous scholarship on the Kabbalah but Buber's *Tales of the Hasidim*, *For the Sake of Heaven*, and *The Way of Man*.

Christianity

Much of Buber's writings, including *I and Thou*, the translation of the Bible, his biblical interpretations, and his work on Hasidism had a pro-

8. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Circle of the Baal Shem Tov: Studies in Hasidism*, ed. by Samuel H. Dresner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), pp. 14-34.

9. Gershom Scholem, "Martin Buber's Interpretation of Hasidism" in *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, tr. Michael A. Meyer (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), pp. 227-250. For Buber's reply to Scholem see "Martin Buber, 'Interpreting Hasidism,'" tr. Maurice Friedman, *Commentary*, XXXVI, 3 (September 1963): 218-225. See also Martin Buber, "Noch einiges zur Darstellung des Chassidismus," *Werke*, III, *Schriften zum Chasidismus* (Munich and Heidelberg: Kosel and Lambert Schneider Verlag, 1963), pp. 991-998.

found impact on Christian laymen and theologians and entered into his lifelong dialogue with Christians and Christianity. Among the scores of theologians whom one might mention whom Buber influenced and with whom he stood in dialogue are Karl Barth, Nicolas Berdyaev, Emil Brunner, H. Richard Niebuhr, Reinhold Niebuhr, T.H. Oldham, Father M.C. D'Arcy, Friedrich Gogarten, Karl Heim, Ronald Gregor Smith, and Paul Tillich. There were also a number of Christian thinkers whose religious thought significantly paralleled Buber's without decisive influence by him even though, in every case, there was dialogue: Ferdinand Ebner, John Macmurray, Gabriel Marcel, and Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, among the most important. Albert Schweitzer not only stood in close friendship and dialogue with him but also decisively influenced Buber's own relationship to Christianity. Following Schweitzer, Buber understood the figure of Jesus in terms of his message of the coming of God's kingdom and the mystery of suffering destined for the servant of God in Deutero-Isaiah. He did not follow Schweitzer in extending the eschatological expectation of a speedy coming of the kingdom to Paul but regarded Paul as a representative of an inauthentic, Hellenized Judaism.

"Being open to the world and withstanding concrete reality," writes Grete Schaeder, "were always a measure of whether a Christian thinker could come close to Buber." Buber could not, of course, follow the Christian theologians' conversion into Christology of his I-Thou relationship between God and man (as I have shown at length in the chapter on "Christianity" in *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue*). Unlike his friend, Franz Rosenzweig, Buber could not acknowledge the equal validity of Judaism and Christianity, one as being already in the eternity of God, the other as being the historical way to God.

We cannot simultaneously stand within and look with the objective eye that gives equal validity to two opposing *claims*. We know the Christian claim only from the outside and we cannot accept it.

In 1947, J.H. Oldham, a leader of the ecumenical movement in the Christian Church wrote:

I am convinced that it is by opening its mind, and conforming its practice, to the truth which Buber has perceived and so powerfully set forth that the Church can recover a fresh understanding of its own faith, and regain a real connection with the actual life of our time.

In 1948, Paul Tillich, who had himself been greatly influenced by Buber, wrote of his significance for Protestant theology as lying in three main directions:

existential interpretation of prophetic religion, his rediscovery of mysticism as an element within prophetic religion, and his understanding of the relation between prophetic religion and culture, especially in the social and political realms. . . . The "I-Thou" philosophy . . . challenging both orthodox and liberal theology, points a way beyond their alternatives.

Others have echoed Rylaarsdam's statement that "Buber is in a unique

way the agent through whom, in our day, Judaism and Christianity have met and enriched one another.” Although Reinhold Niebuhr could not accept Buber’s social and political philosophy, he wholeheartedly accepted his I-Thou philosophy and his interpretation of the Hebrew Bible and characterized him as of “first importance for both Jewish and Christian thinkers.” In 1958, on the occasion of Buber’s eightieth birthday, H. Richard Niebuhr, Reinhold’s brother and an equally eminent Protestant theologian, stated:

More than any other person in the modern world, more even than Kierkegaard, Martin Buber has been for me, and for many of my companions, the prophet of the soul and the witness to that truth which is required of the soul not as solitary but as companionable being.

If Buber’s influence on Christian thought was truly revolutionary, it was often christianized in the process of being taken over, so that many of its salient features were lost. For example, the I-Thou relationship became a Thou-I relationship for many neo-orthodox theologians who wished to cling to the sundering of God and man through original sin and the total dependency of man on God’s grace through faith in Jesus. For many, it became a choice *between* I-Thou and I-It, rather than the alternative of the two, as Buber held. For still others, the Thou was Jesus, rather than the imageless God to whom Buber points. Finally, far more attention was paid by Christian theologians to the I-Thou relationship between man and God and far less to that between man and man, as a result of which the integral unity of the two in Buber’s thought tended to be lost sight of.

If this trend is beginning to be corrected, it is because the new generation of Christian scholars, instead of appropriating Buber for Christianity, have allowed themselves to enter into an open, mutual dialogue with this prophet of the “narrow ridge” and let their own Christianity be modified by it. They recognize, as my own former student Father Donald J. Moore, S.J., puts it, that “we who call ourselves Christian would be much more faithful to our task and to our vocation if we could follow, each in his own way, the spirit of Buber.” If this means, as Father Moore also says, that Buber should be called “a man of universal religion, for he was indeed a man of God,” this universalism itself must be understood as precisely that of the life of dialogue. If Buber did not use his Judaism to shut himself away from persons of other faiths (including the Oriental as well as the Western), neither did he have to leave the ground of his Judaism to meet openhearted men and women of other religions. “I can stand in the doorway of my ancestral house,” Buber wrote, “and speak into the street. The word that is uttered there will not go astray.”

Another way in which the appreciation of Buber has come of age in our day is the recognition that the “death of God” theologies, far from dating him, have served to bring into focus the fact that he was essentially a “prophet of religious secularism,” to use the subtitle of Father Moore’s

book on Buber. Religious secularism is that claim for the hallowing of the everyday and the sanctifying of the profane which stands in uncompromising opposition to every tendency to make of religion a separate upper story of spirituality with no binding force in our lives. "Religion," Buber once wrote, "is the great enemy of mankind." By "religion" he meant the tendency of every organized religion throughout history to promote and sanction a dualism that obscures the face of God and leaves our ordinary lives unhallowed and unhallowable. For Buber, the *mizvah*, or command of God, could never be divorced from the address of the particular hour and the particular situation and turned into a universally valid prescription of law. Buber's view of revelation is not one of dialogue without content, as Orthodox Jewish critics such as Eliezer Berkovits have claimed. But the "content" is not separable from the form, the address from the unique situation in which the address is heard, and the Torah that is revealed in such situations is not "law" but God's instruction in the dialogue with him.

It is precisely Paul's Roman view of Jewish "law" as an objective universal that Buber attacked in his study of Jesus and Paul, *Two Types of Faith* (1950). In that book he declared that, insofar as Christianity fixes God in the image of Jesus, it prevents God from hiding and, therefore, from revealing himself ever anew. On the other hand, Buber recognized and pointed to the tremendous religious significance of Jesus as possibly no Jew has heretofore done while remaining firmly planted on the soil of Judaism. "From my youth onwards I have found in Jesus my great brother. . . . I am more than ever certain that a great place belongs to him in Israel's history of faith and that this place cannot be described by any of the usual categories," Buber wrote in the Foreword to *Two Types of Faith*. Here he identifies faith as trust (*emunah*) with biblical and Pharisaic Judaism and with the teachings of Jesus; faith in the truth of a proposition (*pistis*) with Greek thought, Paulinism, and John. The responses to *Two Types of Faith* have been many and varied on both the Jewish and the Christian side,¹⁰ and it has been of great importance in Buber's influence on Christianity and his dialogue with Christian thinkers.

At first, many American Jews, including distinguished rabbis, greeted Buber's thought with suspicion because of his influence on Christianity, but today he has found a secure place in the thought of American Judaism of all kinds, even though he cannot be identified with any one of the denominations and his attitude toward the Jewish law and his advocacy of Arab-Israeli rapprochement still make him a controversial figure. There is hardly a single one of the new Jewish theologians — such as Emil Fackenheim, Eugene Borowitz, Arthur Cohen, and Steven Schwarzschild, to name a few — who has not been decisively influenced by his encounter with Buber's thought.

10. See Maurice Friedman, *Martin Buber's Life and Work: The Later Years — 1945-1965* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1984), pp. 90-101, 431-435, 450 n. 2.

Buber's Religious Influence in General

In 1963, when he was eighty-five years old, Buber was given the Erasmus Prize in Holland to honor the significance of his work in furthering the spiritual life and consciousness of the peoples of Europe, with particular reference to his philosophy of dialogue, his translation and interpretation of the Hebrew Bible, his general awakening of an interest in and an understanding of Hasidism, his role as mediator and interpreter in general, and his work toward Arab-Israeli rapprochement.

At a memorial meeting for Buber in New York City on July 13, 1965, Paul Tillich and I, along with others, spoke. At the conclusion of my talk, I said that

In a time in which we are in danger of losing our birthright as human beings, Martin Buber has given us again an image of man. In a time in which human thought preserves the *idea* of God but destroys the reality of our relationship to him, Buber has pointed us anew to the meeting with the "eternal Thou."

Tillich pointed to Buber as "a man whose whole being was impregnated by the experience of the divine presence."

[He] knew that the prophetic, without the mystical element, degenerates into legalism and moralism while the mystical element alone leads to an escape from reality and from the demands of the here and now. . . . This gave Martin Buber his freedom from ritualism and his freedom for the secular world. . . . This attitude is a reason for Martin Buber's far reaching influence on the secular world and particularly on the younger generation for which the traditional activities and assertions of churches and synagogues have become largely irrelevant. He knew that we cannot produce new symbols at will, but he also knew that we cannot use them as if nothing had happened in history. This makes him a genuine theologian.

As long as I have known Martin Buber, I felt his reality as something which transcends bodily presence or intellectual influence. He was there in the midst of the Western world, a part of it, a power in it, through his person, but also independent of him as an individual being, as a Spiritual reality impossible to be overlooked, provoking Yes or No or both. This Spiritual reality which was in the man Martin Buber will last for a long time in future history and open up for many that which is above history.

Buber And His Biographer

Review-Essay by STEVEN S. SCHWARZSCHILD

Martin Buber's Life and Work. Vol. I: *The Early Years 1878-1923*; Vol. II: *The Middle Years 1923-1945*; *The Late Years 1945-1965*. By MAURICE FRIEDMAN. New York. E.P. Dutton, 1981 for Vol. I, 1983 for Vols. II and III.

WHATEVER CRITICISM, AND HOWEVER BASIC the criticism, one may wish to level at Martin Buber, none can question that he was one of the very few truly great Jews and one of the great personages of the twentieth century. As this gigantic work of Maurice Friedman's reminds one, if reminding be needed, Buber made unique and important contributions in religious thought, literature, Jewish history, Biblical scholarship, philosophy, the ideology and movement of Zionism, European and Near-Eastern politics, social thought, the theory and practice of translation, philosophical psychology and anthropology, hasidism, education, and many more fields. His bibliography and the secondary literature about him are long since unencompassable. He inter-acted with just about all of his important contemporaries and with many of the great figures in past culture and history. In at least three respects he played a role that made a real difference in history: in the development of Zionism and, therefore, the State of Israel; during the Nazi years of German Jewry; and, again, in the moderate wings of the counter-cultural movements of the 1960s in the West.

For several decades Maurice Friedman has been the chief outlet for Buber in the English-speaking world — as translator of his writings, as author of numerous books and articles about him or derived from his basic views and values, and as his personal disciple. These three volumes are clearly intended to be Friedman's *summa* on Buber, and, if only by dint of sheer size, they are likely to be taken as the canonical treatment of Buber's "life and work" for some time to come.

The chronology of the three volumes is indicated in the respective sub-titles. Within each book the chapters are not only a combination of biography and substantive exposition (as promised by the over-all title) but also a mixture of topical discussions with historical circumstances. This leads inevitably to a good deal of overlap and, indeed, some topical subjects are peculiarly combined. No question about it: you can find in these volumes almost everything by and about Buber that you could pos-

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sibly look for — and much, much more. Most of it should long since have been known to the student, but some sections flesh out the picture nicely, e.g., the troubles in the Frankfurt Lehrhaus (Vol. II, pp. 31-34) and the reception-history of *Two Types of Faith* (Vol. III, chap. 4).¹

The author's personal posture in this work determines the result. Friedman is a Buberian "believer." This makes him gratifyingly and instructively sympathetic to his subject, who was otherwise so widely embattled in and beyond his lifetime. But Friedman goes further: he has written virtually an hagiography. There is no critical stance here whatsoever. Objections to Buber and his work are curtly overridden, and his faults are covered up. Whatever rare and little argument there is, is internal to Buberianism, and even this is usually directed (sometimes quite nastily: e.g., Vol. II, pp. 362f.) against other scholars' interpretations.

Friedman desperately wants to persuade. Like Buber himself, he does not believe in "objectivity" and, sure enough, the reader does not get it. As a result, there is, in the first place, a great deal of preaching. Buber's own poeticizing language has long been noted: some like it, while others find it bombastic and evasive;² here it is overlaid with Friedman's own sentimental and effusive style, and thus one gets a double-dosage. In the third place, in the pursuit of persuasion rather than of exposition, Friedman says that he wanted to keep scholarly apparatus out of the way of the reader. For this reason there are no footnotes. Instead, each chapter carries in the back of the volume a thicket of bibliographies, references, and expansive notes, some of which are totally irrelevant, others untraceable, almost none of which directs the student to specific evidence, and all in an impenetrable helter-skelter. Above all, the author says that he wanted to write a "dialography." What this awful word turns out to mean is that the work really ought to have been entitled "Martin Buber and Maurice Friedman." Friedman pushes himself center-stage all the time — sometimes legitimately so (especially as regards Buber's image in this country), but usually not. He seems to lack confidence in Buber's own intellectual and literary power and, instead, gives us Buber-*via*-Friedman ("*Shakespeare ibersetzt un verbessert*"). All sorts of, at best, epiphenomenal, if not entirely trivial, anecdotes are reported, and all sorts of apostrophes to Buber, often from far-fetched quarters, are reproduced at length — in the *genre*, perhaps, of Jewish praises of mystical masters (whatever their value, and however inappropriate, in any case, to this work).

Friedman engages in some extended psychologizing, at long range. Early in Vol. I he asserts that the divorce of Buber's parents and the

1. Cf., however, the articles by E. Brunner and H. v. Balthasar in *M. Buber*, eds. P.A. Schilpp and M. Friedman [Library of Living Philosophers] (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1963).

2. Cf., e.g., Walter Kaufmann, tr., *I and Thou* (New York: Scribner's, 1970), pp. 19, 23, *et pass.*; Walter Kaufmann, "M. Buber: 'The Quest for You,'" *The Jewish Spectator*, (Spring, 1980): 23 about Buber's "affected" style — quoted in the *N.Y. Times*, Feb. 9, 1978, on Buber, who "approximates the oracular tone of false prophets."

absence of the mother in his life was a basic cause of his central concern with personal relationship, and at the end of Vol. III he closes the circle on this thesis. On the other hand, many intimate aspects of Buber's life, to which one may feel entitled under the circumstances, are kept from the reader. For example, what kind of marriage-ceremony did Buber and his Gentile wife have?³ How to explain the tense relationships in his grandparental, parental, and in his own families? Exactly when and where were his children born — how were they brought up — and what remained Buber's impact, complex as it obviously was, on his own posterity? What, if any, Jewish observances were ever kept in the Buber-home? Etc.

Vol. III, p. 261 intimates some estrangement between Buber and Friedman. Indeed, one wonders what Buber would have said about this hagiography of him. It is furthermore clear from the author's own reports that the Buber Archives at the Hebrew University and the resources of Buber's closest surviving associates, his family, Ernst A. Simon, H.S. Bergmann (since deceased), and others, were largely kept from him (*Ibid.*, Preface). One wonders what the reasons were. One of them is bound to have been the following:

There are still a goodly number of people around who, if only in the second and third generations, directly experienced Buber and his teachings. They all could write about "Buber and I." Few have done so, and none so blatantly as Friedman. One senses in him an inability to confront Buber — to establish what Buber insisted on as the "distance" in which alone "relation" could properly occur. He either identifies himself with Buber, or, worse, *vice-versa*. I, for one, never was and still am not sure that Buber himself could really confront other people and their thoughts, or, as Gershom Scholem argued (Vol. III, chap. 12, *et pass.*),⁴ that he could even, for example, confront hasidism. One can get the impression that Buber's thou's were, in fact, projected variants of his own I. But Buber certainly did know that there were some serious people and outlooks that did not like him or did not agree even on basics with him and that there were important reasons for these differences. He was no doubt vain, but he had taste. His epigone, however, is very different. At one point (*Ibid.*, p. 249) Friedman quotes Fritz Kaufmann to the effect that Buber was "attacked by those close to him with a kind of tragic love-hate, while those far removed are his adherents," but it does not occur to him that *de te fabula narratur*. Baruch Kurzweil, a dedicated and critical student of Buber's, also said that Buber "determined our way also when we strug-

3. H. Gordon, "The Sheltered Aesthete . . ." in *Martin Buber — A Centenary Volume*, eds., Haim Gordon and Jochanan Bloch (New York: KTAV, 1984), p. 29, speaks of "Paula Buber's conversion to Judaism."

4. M. Friedman, "Hasidism: The Buber-Scholem Controversy," *Midstream* (Feb. 1984): 40-48; cf. also Steven T. Katz, "M. Buber's Misuse of Hasidic Sources," in *Post-Holocaust Dialogues: Critical Studies in Modern Jewish Thought* (New York: New York University Press, 1983), chap. 2.

gled against him and when our ways parted.”⁵ And Scholem said: “To enter into controversy with Buber meant to be thrown back and forth between admiration and rejection, between the readiness to hear his message and the disappointment over this message and the impossibility [Buber’s inability] of realizing it . . .”⁶ So, also, this reviewer likes to think that his own mixture of admiration for Buber’s cultural and Zionist, humanist universalism combined with a fundamental rejection of his basic philosophical posture (Nietzschean vitalism, anti-rationalism, ethical subjectivism, religious individualism and anarchism, and political occasionalism) would have been welcomed by Buber as a serious confrontation. Certainly the life-long, always tense relationship between Buber and Scholem exemplifies such a stance on the highest level.

Friedman is, however, so completely the hagiographer that he functions here neither as an historian nor as an analytical intellectual. His phrasings leave doubt about his linguistic credentials in German, certainly in Hebrew, and often even in his self-indulgent English.⁷ His knowledge of technical philosophers seems second-hand and reflected through Buber. His knowledge of Hermann Cohen (cf. Vol. I, pp. 215-219, 285, 301, 411, etc.)⁸ and of Franz Rosenzweig (Ibid., pp. 204f., 288, 408f., and 418f. in a very fuzzy reading of *The Star of Redemption*), both of whom are decisive for an understanding of Buber in his personal, intellectual, and historical setting, is entirely too amateurish. Literary giants of our century are regularly represented as derivative from, rather than contributory to, Buber: e.g., Kafka (Vol. I, p. 141), Rilke (Ibid., p. 412), H. v. Hofmannsthal (Vol. II, p. 346), etc. And the biographer’s grounding in main-line Jewish knowledge, too, is repeatedly cast in doubt by some throw-away phrases and remarks.⁹

5. B. Kurzweil, *Facing the Spiritual Perplexity of Our Time* (Hebr.), ed. M. Schwarcz (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University, 1976) p. 111; cf. also Kaufmann, “M. Buber . . .,” pp. 26, 28.

6. Cf. M. Friedman, “Hasidism . . .,” p. 46.

7. I have a list — impressionistic but long — of trivial as well as significant mistakes and solecisms in these volumes. To bring that list here would seem pedantic. What matters most in the present connection is probably the question of Hebrew, and Friedman’s repeated acknowledgement of translators’ help for Hebrew sources speaks for itself.

8. On the Cohen-Buber connection cf. also, although even this is, as I shall show below, not quite satisfactory, Rivka Horwitz, *Buber’s Way to ‘I and Thou’* (Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 1978), pp. 166-170, 254 f. and David Biale, *Gershom Scholem — Kabbalah and Counter-History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), pp. 80f., 109f., 151, 186 and 203.

9. Again, I have a list of Jewish improprieties, which I omit here to avoid nitpicking. One especially objectionable example should suffice. Vol. I, p. 293 refers to Rabbi Nehemiah Nobel as a “Conservative rabbi.” He was, in fact, the Orthodox rabbi of the Frankfurt am Main Jewish Community. Vol. II, pp. 41f. tells a story of a meeting between Rabbi Nobel and Buber. The term “*Halachot*” is wrongly used there. Nobel’s house is referred to as not “a traditional Jewish home.” The requirement of three people is mentioned for *mezuman*, while the only persons mentioned as present are Rabbi Nobel, Buber, and Mrs. Nobel. I’ll eat my hat if Buber or Nobel said or did any of the things reported about them; they are totally incompatible with the characters and sensibilities of the people involved. (I do not doubt that there is some such story floating around, but it is not this version.) Above all, Friedman’s text says: “In the volume in celebration of Rabbi Nehemiah Nobel’s fiftieth birthday, Ernst

Buber and his work, right or wrong, remain an important and valuable factor for all who live consciously in their presence. Friedman and his work, because they are epigonic and hagiographic, counterproductively make one wonder even about the very object of their adoration. For those reasons, and others, this reviewer's judgment of Friedman's massive work would have to be that, certainly, no one in the future will be able to deal with Buber and his work without ploughing through it and taking it seriously. On the other hand, it is very far from a reliable or rigorous treatment. Someone else will have to make that contribution some day.

If this were a discussion of Buber himself many serious problems should be raised: his insistence on a bizarre ontology; his strange, differential attitudes toward Judaism and Christianity; his own contributions to the total failure of all of his politics (European, socialist, and especially Zionist) and to his frequent failures even in intimate, personal relations; his life-long inability to practice what he preached, whether regarding *'aliyah*, peace, or, for that matter, even soldiering, the revolution of 1918/1919 (cf. Vol. I, chap. 11), etc., i.e., the continuous lack of what he called "realization"; his strange attentiveness to invidious thinkers (like Nietzsche, Heidegger, Jung, etc.), accompanied by an unwillingness to work hard on significant ones; the mechanical use of his cookie-cutter "I-thou/I-it" to shape whatever dough the universe provides (and Friedman is nowhere near so imaginative at this as Buber was); his Weberian reliance on personal charisma, i.e., "leaders" (cf. Vol. I, pp. 232, 238), whether in Zionism, (e.g., Herzl: *Ibid.*, p. 68), *hasidism* ("tzaddikim"), or in his own pedagogy, etc.¹⁰ But, in fact, our task here is to consider not Buber himself but Friedman's treatment of him. I will, therefore, limit myself to one example: how the biographer follows his hero in mystifying the history of a moral, political, and literary episode of importance.

Vol. I, chap. 9 is entitled "The First World War and the Breakthrough to Dialogue." It includes two claims: 1) Buber's attitude to the war was, if not right, at least respectable; 2) the experience of the war and of his own changing reactions to it brought about Buber's "breakthrough" from his earlier mysticism to his classical "dialogicism," as canonically laid down in *I and Thou* (Vol. I, p. 195). (Paul R. Flohr had earlier made precisely this argument.)¹¹ Both claims are demonstrably wrong, as Buber,

Simon tells the story. . ." The volume referred to (*Gabe Herrn Rabbiner Dr. Nobel zum 50. Geburtstag*, [Frankfurt: Kaufmann 5682 = 1921]), is not listed in the Friedman bibliography. I could not believe the story. I looked in the volume. It's not there. Simon has an essay in it, "Plato and Tragedy," but there is nothing there, of course, about Buber, or Nobel, and as for *mezumman* at the "Symposium" . . .!

10. Cf. my forthcoming "A Critique of M. Buber's Social Philosophy — A Loving Re-appraisal," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, XXXI/1986.

11. Paul R. Flohr, "The Road to *I and Thou*: An Inquiry into Buber's Transition from Mysticism to Dialogue," in *Texts and Responses . . . to N.N. Glatzer*, eds. M. Fishbane and P.R. Flohr (Leiden: Brill, 1975), pp. 201-225, and *Von der Mystik zum Dialog — M. Bubers geistige Entwicklung bis zu 'Ich und Du'* (Koenigstein/Tr.: Juedischer Verlag, 1979), pp. 14, 131-140, 168 f. etc.

Flohr, and Friedman have to have known. They all gloss over this, however, in order to enhance the icon of the humane sage Buber.

Immediately before the beginning of World War I, Buber belonged to a very small group of European intellectuals and artists, whom Flohr rightly called “geniuses’ aristocrats,”¹² who assumed an élitist, nostalgic, vitalistic, and sophisticatedly primitivistic attitude, and who made themselves believe that if only they could seize political power they would save the world (Vol. I, pp. 180f., 195f.). Once the war broke out, however, Buber, unlike some other members of the group, became a bombastic and bloody-minded advocate of the cause of German arms. He argued, among other things, that undergoing the war-experience created “community” in what had become the soulless German state and that Jews, Zionists, should be part of that experience, so that they could eventually transfer its spirit to Jewish nationalism. (“... we are all nationalists together” [Vol. I, p. 222]; “For each who wants to spare himself in this time the statement of the Gospel of John is valid: ‘He who loves his life will lose it.’ ... When we Jews then feel, wholly feel to its core what this means: then we shall no longer need our old motto, *Not by might but by spirit*, since force and spirit shall now become one for us. Incipit vita nova!” [Ibid., p. 193]. [Cf. also Vol. I, p. 197. *N.b.* the literary style: “wholly feel to its core what this means” — the sources¹³ — and the paraphrasing of the prophet!]) This was the “war-Buber” (“*Kriegsbuber*”), from whom his friend Gustav Landauer divorced himself personally, politically, and Jewishly (cf. Vol. I, p. 200, etc.), and who insisted on seeing God *in* history, rather than spiritually and morally above it. (One might add that, while so many men spent four years in the trenches, Buber bought his country-home, wrote pseudo-poetic effusions about the spiritual hardships he was suffering [Vol. I, p. 192f.], even as, at the end of the war, he carefully absented himself from the Munich Revolution, though for the rest of his life he then proclaimed his grief for Landauer, who was brutally martyred in it.) There were many other influential Zionist leaders who joined Buber in his militaristic attitude — Nahum Goldmann, S.H. Bergmann, M.J. Berdicewski = -bin-Gorion, Jakob Klatzkin, etc. Siegfried Bernfeld, later the important psychoanalyst, wrote in *Der Jude*: “We march to the war not because we are Jews but because we are Zionists” (Vol. I, p. 210). (Scholem, on the other hand, was expelled from school and eventually had to exile himself in Switzerland because he argued against Buber’s stand, and Judah Magnes, too, stuck to his pacifist guns [Vol. I, pp. 210, 400].)¹⁴

Contrary to Friedman’s (and Flohr’s) assertions, there is no evidence

12. “The Road . . .,” p. 200 f., n. 6.

13. Cf. L. Augustine Grady, “M. Buber and the Gospel of St. John,” in *Thought* (Fordham University Quarterly), Sep. 1978.

14. Cf. also Biale, *Op. cit.*, pp. 58-65, 103f. (There is much more in this work that is important for a proper evaluation of Buber.)

whatsoever that Buber ever said a single word that deviated from this line until the war was over (Cf. Vol. I, pp. 200, 225). "When there is war it must be fought" (Vol. III, p. 24).¹⁵ "Only after the end of the war" (Vol. I, pp. 179, 260), when there was peace, then Buber favored it. I suppose that is part of the "realism" that Buber always propounded. That is one thing. But it is another to fuzz-up, *ex post facto*, to "revise," in fact to deceive about the historical record. Flohr cites¹⁶ unnoted omissions in subsequent editions of Buber's war-time writings. Indeed, Buber ordered that none of his writings, prior to 1916, and not previously re-published, were ever to be printed again (Vol. I, p. 187). And Flohr states, contrary to Friedman (Vol. I, pp. 398f.), that Buber pressured Hans Kohn not to tell the truth about this episode in his 1930 biography.¹⁷

Buber's later followers, then, not only upheld their teacher's self-mystification but also aggravated it in various ways. For one thing, they actually misstate the case:

Buber was never a German superpatriot, like Hermann Cohen, . . . nor is there any evidence that he ever signed a document supporting the Kaiser as some German intellectuals of that time did. On the other hand, he was neither a pacifist nor an anarchist like Gustav Landauer, and, during the first year of the war he was not able to maintain Landauer's almost fanatic clarity of opposition. Instead he succumbed at times . . . (Vol. I, pp. 192-3).

(*N.b.* the convolutions of these sentences! Also, why was Buber "not able" to maintain something that is then called "almost fanatic" clarity of opposition? I draw the reader's attention to pp. 220f., 225, and pp. 214, 224 which deal, not with opposition to the war but with opposition to German war-time antisemitism — something that also deeply shook up H. Cohen.)¹⁸ Furthermore, they write purple prose with which to paint over the facts. They have managed to entrench the almost universal impression that Hermann Cohen and his kind of liberal Judaism fell prey to assimilationist German nationalism, as the Friedman quotation above again illustrates, while the Zionists are falsely represented as having had early and grave intimations of the dangers of that nationalism (cf. Vol. I, pp. 214-219, etc.). In fact, Cohen was at least as wary of pre-Nazi teutonism as they were,¹⁹ and Cohen's socialist disciples, like Dimitri Gawronsky, Eduard Bernstein, Kurt Eisler, and other "liberals" like Stefan Zweig, Landauer, Magnes, and Scholem, not to speak of Rabbi Aron Tamaret in Poland, also closed their ears to the deadly siren-songs of militarism.

15. Cf. also Aubrey Hodes, *M. Buber: An Intimate Portrait* (N.Y.: Viking, 1971), p. 99.

16. "The Road . . .," nn. 53, 87, 89.

17. H. Kohn, *M. Buber — Sein Werk und seine Zeit — Ein Versuch über Religion und Politik* (Hellerau: Jacob Hegner, 1930), esp. p. 163f., with the usual — under the circumstances — especially improper, side-swipes at H. Cohen.

18. Cf. Schwarzschild, "'Germanism and Judaism' — H. Cohen's Normative Paradigm of the German-Jewish Symbiosis," in *Jews and Germans from 1860 to 1933: The Problematic Symbiosis*, ed. David Bronsen (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1979), p. 139.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 141-157.

(Friedman devotes a whole chapter, in Vol. I, to the journal *Der Jude*, which Buber and his associates founded in the middle of the war, but, like A.A. Cohen's recent anthology of that periodical,²⁰ he does not bother with, if he knows it, the *Neue Jüdische Monatshefte*, which Cohen and his associates formed at the same time and which was, in its way, important for the evolution of twentieth-century Jewry and Judaism, and with which *Der Jude* carried on interesting inter-changes.)

The second thesis, that disenchantment with the war caused Buber's "breakthrough" ("*Durchbruch*")²¹ from mysticism to dialogicism, is equally and demonstrably false. For one thing, if, as we have seen by now, Buber never was so disenchanted then, also, this claim cannot be true. Furthermore, Friedman is quite right in emphasizing in the present work that the transition from mysticism to dialogicism in Buber's thought was a gradual development and that the latter always remained a form of mysticism in many important ways (cf., e.g., Vol. I, pp. 93, 301, etc.).

Added to all this is the mystification which Buber initiated as to when he began to write *I and Thou*. Why would the first edition not carry any date of publication (1923), while the last page carries the legend: "Sketch of the work, whose beginning this book is: Spring 1916; first draft of this book: Autumn 1919; final version: Spring 1922"? Friedman, too, tries to date it as early as 1916 (Vol. I, pp. 201, 298f.).²² Also, *For the Sake of Heaven* (vastly overrated and over-interpreted by Friedman) is curiously and massively pre-dated (Vol. II, pp. 34f., 309-325). The texts adduced to support this chronology carry no dates and their cue-words, for that matter, are susceptible to all sorts of different interpretations.

20. *The Jew: Essays from M. Buber's Journal 'Der Jude' 1916-1928* (University of Alabama Press, 1980), and his "M. Buber and *Der Jude*," *Midstream* (June/July 1980).

21. "*Durchbruch*"/"breakthrough," along with its cognates, was, as a matter of fact, a heavily laden ideological, political and cultural slogan in Central Europe around the time of the First World War. There was, for one thing, the slogan about Germany's "breakthrough to world-power" ("*Durchbruch zur Weltmacht*"). See also, P.P. Savage, *Réalité sociale et idéologie religieuse dans les romans de Thomas Mann* (Paris, 1954), pp. 110f., 472f., in connection with Mann's notorious war-time mythopoetic *Contemplations of a Non-Political Man*. Mann was later to ironize that notion of "breakthrough," in large part by playing on the name of Arnold Schoenberg's *avant-garde*, Viennese journal of music, *Der Anbruch*. See Th. Mann, *The Story of a Novel* (N.Y., 1961), pp. 44, 72, and *Doktor Faustus* (Stockholm: Bermann-Fischer, 1947), e.g., pp. 594, 602, 690. See also, T.W. Adorno, *Mahler: eine musikalische Physiognomie*, Vol. 13 of his *Gesammelte Schriften* (Suhrkamp, 1971), pp. 154, 275.

Cf. also Franz Rosenzweig's 1917 essay, "*Cannä und Gorlice — Eine Erörterung des strategischen Raumbegriffs*," in *Zweistromland — Kleinere Schriften zu Glauben und Denken*, eds. R. and A. Mayer [= F. Rosenzweig, *Der Mensch und Sein Werk — Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. III, (Dordrecht: M. Nijhoff, 1984)], especially pp. 290-295, all about militarily tactical and historical "breakthroughs." (Cf. also the other essays in this section, "On Politics," several of them never previously published. Talk about Jewish Germanic superpatriotism!)

22. Cf. also Buber, "Zur Geschichte des dialogischen Prinzips" (1954), in *Werke*, Vol. I, 1962, p. 298 = *Between Man and Man* (N.Y., 1955), and *I and Thou*, tr. W. Kaufmann, pp. 49f. But Kaufmann himself says that the book was written in a burst of "enthusiasm" in 1922 ("Buber's Failures and Triumphs," in Gordon and Bloch, *Op. cit.*, pp. 9, 22).

Rivka Horwitz's *Buber's Way to 'I and Thou'*²³ makes a very strong case that *I and Thou* resulted from Buber's series of lectures at the Frankfurt Lehrhaus, "Religion as Presence," and that Franz Rosenzweig's writings and thought were then a necessary pre-condition to Buber's thought at that stage. Her argument, however, earns her only a virulent attack at the hands of Friedman (Vol. I, pp. 298f., 322, 325, 408ff., 418f.).²⁴ The historical truth of the matter is that Rosenzweig, in turn, had procured the conceptuality and vocabulary of I-thou/I-it from Hermann Cohen's systematic philosophical writings; for example:

For this self there is no I without thou. *Re'a* ("neighbor") is what the other is called; he is like thee; *he is the thou to the I* (Cohen's italics). The self is the result of the eternal relationship between I and thou — the infinite ideal of this eternal relationship. The ideal remains ideal, 'tis true; the task always remains task; but the *ideal* is an ideal precisely also only by demanding, and insofar as it demands, emulation, — and thus it makes it possible to approximate it. . . .²⁵

As the second part of this passage makes clear, by the time that Rosenzweig and Buber had subjected this conceptuality to their own use it was transmogrified from its Kantian, regulative character into a metaphysical, ontologistic proclamation (cf., Vol. I, p. 421).²⁶

In any case, as for the conceptual substance of the question, namely whether dialogicism is connected with Buber's opposition to war while mysticism was connected with his earlier patriotism, there is really no connection whatever between, on the one hand, the mystical notion of "experience" (*Erlebnis*)²⁷ and war and, on the other hand, between the notion

23. *Op. cit.*, and her "F. Rosenzweig's Unpublished Writings," *Journal of Jewish Studies* XX/1-4 (1969): 76f.

24. Cf. also Friedman, "Buber's Way to 'I and Thou'," *JUDAISM*, XXX/3 (Summer 1981): 363-368. In order to foreclose a *tu quoque* argument I am omitting considerations of my family's relations with Buber. For some of it, cf. "M. Buber: Jewish Education as Spiritual Resistance," *St. Louis Jewish Light* (Aug. 2, 1978): 16-A. But at this point I must mention that I possess the hand-written notes that my late mother took at those lectures. They tend to confirm Horwitz's thesis.

25. "Charakteristik der Ethik Maimunis," in *Moses ben Maimon — Sein Leben, seine Werke und sein Einfluss*, eds. W. Bacher etc., (Leipzig, 1908 (!)), Vol. 1, p. 120. Cf. also the central chapters, 8-10, in Cohen's *Religion of Reason* . . . "And now the question of thou and I can begin anew" (p. 25) and *Ethics of the Pure Will* (Berlin: Cassirer, 1904), p. 25.

26. Cf. T. Weiss-Rosmarin, in *Sh'ma*, 4/68 (Feb. 22, 1974): 61f.: "Buber repressed what Cohen had taught."

27. The history of "*Erlebnis*" in German philosophy must here be kept in mind. H.G. Gadamer develops his Heideggerian hermeneutic philosophy on the ground of "*Erlebnis*" "experience," and in his *Truth and Method* [German] (Tuebingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1960), esp. pp. 55-65 and throughout he traces the history of that notion from Hegel, Dilthey, etc., i.e., through the German Romantic tradition. Cf., however, P. Fischer-Appelt, *Metaphysik im Horizont der Theologie Wm. Herrmanns* . . . (the close friend and Protestant colleague of Hermann Cohen's), (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1965), pp. 158-161, for its actual, though inverted, connection with Marburg neo-Kantianism, as well as Roger A. Johnson, *The Origins of Demythologizing — Philosophy and Historiography in the Theology of R. Bultmann* (Leiden:

of “meeting” (“*Begegnung*”) and anti-militarism, as Flohr claims (cf. Vol. I, chap. 16, and pp. 391, 398, and 415f.).²⁸

There is nothing wrong, of course, with a man changing his mind, especially when he changes it for the better. However, it is a different matter if he covers over the record of his earlier mistakes; secondary writers, who claim to present history, certainly may not. In a grave case like the present one there is also the moral scruple that should surely be faced: suppose a young Jew went to war in 1914 in part because Buber exhorted him to do so (and there may have been many such), and suppose he was killed (as very many were). When Buber later changed his mind on that exhortation, what was the situation then between Buber and his apologists, on the one hand, and the victim and his loved ones, on the other? In 1914 we saw him reject Zech. 4:6, while some forty years later he made it a sublime principle: “Not by power and not by might but by My spirit . . .” (Vol. III, p. 327)! Do we not, at the very least, owe them the truth and, perhaps, much, much more — perhaps the ultimate confession of guilt: the silence of the inability to put such guilt into words? Or, perhaps, one must, at this point, perform the repentance of hard work for peace.

Buber’s Zionism — his early advocacy of Arab-Jewish cooperation and bi-nationalism, his decisive role in B’rit Shalom and Ichud, his and his associates’ opposition to the partition of Palestine in 1948, etc. — is, then, a satisfactory response to his German and Jewish jingoism of the First World War. On this score, too, however, he always totally failed — today more than ever, and, of course, he knew it.

Obviously, Buber cannot be blamed for the grisly history, Jewish and Gentile, of the twentieth century. On the whole, he certainly tried, albeit in vain, to soften it, if not to turn it around. But this, in turn, raises the fundamental question whether what he argued was the proper method of humanizing the social world, the incrementalism of “the line of demarcation,” is, in fact, a valid and useful tool. He held that we must accept as much of the actual world as necessary and try to improve it as much as possible. At the 12th Zionist Congress, in 1921, he said:

Such demarcation cannot be made according to rules valid once and for all. Only the secret of hourly acting with a continually repeated sense of responsibility holds the rule for such demarcation.²⁹

Brill, 1974), chapt. 2, “The Philosophical Origins of Demythologizing: Marburg Neo-Kantianism,” p. 58, etc., on Bultmann’s “*Erlebnis*” and “*Erfahrung*.”

28. Cf. also Cohen, “M. Buber and *Der Jude*,” p. 31f.

29. *Israel and the World* (N.Y.: Schocken, 1948), p. 216. On “the line of demarcation” in Friedman’s present Buber-work, cf. Vol. I, pp. 256, 268, 341, Vol. II, pp. 18, 117, 135, 150, 249, Vol. III, pp. 6, 195. Cf. also A. Ernst Simon, *The Line of Demarcation — Nationalism, Zionism, and the Jewish-Arab Conflict in M. Buber’s Thought and Work* (Hebr.), (Giv’at Havivah: Center for Arab Studies, 1973). In any case, will someone explain to me, in plain English, what that phrase means: “the secret of hourly acting with a continually repeated sense of responsibility”?

We ought to ask: How do you draw that line? Who is to draw it? What are the criteria for drawing it? Buber, as the words just cited illustrate, would accept no general principles on the basis of which to answer these and similar questions, any more than he would accept *halakhah*, and for the same reasons. His personal stance, and the stance of those whom he was able to influence personally on this score, was certainly admirable. As Kurzweil put it, "his faith in man, in his honor, that he is created in the image of God, this served him as a regulative against the danger of German irrationalism and of myths."³⁰ But the history of our time, if not a philosophical analysis of his social philosophy,³¹ shows that such subjective, "situationalist" postures cannot be meaningful in history. Even his most devoted friends had to raise this problem with him again and again, with respect to *halakhah*³² and with respect to ethics in general. As Simon put it, Buber was "a believing occasionalist,"³³ whose "radical subjectivism . . . occasionally borders on arbitrariness/nihilism (*sh'riryut*),"³⁴ so that one must ask whether "partial moral moratoriums can be allowed."³⁵ In sum, Buber's patriotism(s) were deeply invidious; his occasionalist pacifism (not pacifism) became a tragic failure for him, for the Jewish people, and for our world.

Having said all that, and retracting none of the negative criticisms of Friedman or even of Buber, what I said here at the beginning remains, nonetheless, true: Buber was, indeed, one of the very few truly great Jews and one of the great personages of the century. I, for one, find it extremely hard to think of another single person in this age into whose hands I would willingly entrust the task of defining our essential Jewish humanness. In the light of what has been said, how can that be?

Buber struggled heroically with almost all of the demons — moral, political, cultural, intellectual, and religious — that swarmed, and still swarm, through the night of our contemporary history. Israel once came out of such a nightly struggle wounded but victorious. In the present struggle Buber was defeated. As he said himself in the epilogue to the German edition of *For the Sake of Heaven*, "There is no way in this desert night."³⁶ The demons are too strong. But Buber gave them a very good fight. Who could have done better?

30. *Op. cit.*, p. 111; cf. also p. 94.

31. Cf. Schwarzschild, "A Critique . . ."

32. Cf. Rosenzweig's "The Builders," in *On Jewish Education*, ed. N.N. Glatzer (N.Y.: Schocken, 1954), and S. Schwarzschild, "Survey of Current Theological Literature," *JUDAISM*, VIII/2 (1959): 168-170.

33. "M. Buber, der Erzieher," in Schilpp, *Op. cit.*, p. 499.

34. *Line of Demarcation*, p. 54.

35. "M. Buber, der Erzieher," loc. cit.

36. *Gog und Magog* (Heidelberg: L. Schneider, 1949), p. 408 (the last sentence of this book).

Moses and the Cults: The Question of Religious Leadership

TIKVA FRYMER-KENSKY

A SIGNIFICANT PHENOMENON OF THE CONTEMPORARY religious scene is the continuing attraction of large numbers of people, mostly young, to such groups as the Society for Krishna Consciousness (Hare Krishna), the Unification Church (Moonies), the Divine Light Mission and a whole set of small groups, all of which are commonly called "cults." Their popularity highlights one of the most important facets of religious history, the issue of leadership and the proper relationship between the members of an emerging religion and their leader-originator. One of the primary characteristics of modern cults is the intensity of the attachment of members to their group and, particularly, to the leader. Despite their expressed allegiance to an ultimate god, the main thrust of their belief is the devotion to the group's leader. His strength and the promise of salvation that allegiance to him represents are, together, the centripetal force holding these people together. They concentrate around him in a tight cluster which removes itself from other, more ordinary, societal ties. These groups are thus particularly characterized by their willingness to give up any prior identity, individual self-determination and ego-control to leaders who, like Reverend Moon or Reverend Jim Jones, become, in effect, semi-divine characters.

There are many factors that make individuals susceptible to the pull of a leader-led salvation cult. People tend to join them at transition-points in their lives: between high school and college, towards the end of college, etc., when old ties are being broken and new ones have not yet been established. The feelings of rootlessness, loneliness and (at least partial) alienation that are felt in such circumstances make people vulnerable to the attraction of cult communities and the security of following the leader.

In their recruitment procedures, the cults frequently enhance the feelings of anomie that potential recruits may already be feeling. They may invite prospective members to week-end retreats, and then induce them to stay for an additional period. During this retreat, the visitors are isolated from their normal ties and activities and are introduced to many new elements in their life style. They undergo a change of locale, a shift in waking and sleeping hours, a (for some) radical change in diet. These

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changes have the effect of disembodiment from their old life and eroding their sense of their own identity. The effect is somewhat similar to that reported by draftees: when stripped of their clothes for their physical examination, shorn of their former hairstyles and issued identical clothing, they begin to feel divorced from their former life. This disembodiment from the familiar makes the individual more malleable and more capable of being "molded into a soldier" (to use the army analogy); it also makes him respond more readily to promises of a new identity, a new life and salvation. This technique of recruitment, which is sometimes called "brainwashing," is not the drastic brainwashing described by Korean War prisoners. It is, nevertheless, a highly effective technique of ego-manipulation. It strips people who are already susceptible to feelings of rootlessness and alienation of their old sense of self. Then, when a new identity is offered, a "self" centered in a group and its leader, this new "self" is seen as highly attractive and the recruit gives up his individual identity, his self-determination and his "freedom" to join the group.

If we look at the situation of the people of Israel immediately after they left Egypt, it is apparent that they shared many of the characteristics recognized in potential converts to the modern cults. They were totally removed from their old life, for they were no longer slaves and no longer in Egypt. They underwent a complete change of diet, from the "leeks and cucumbers" of Egypt to the manna of the desert. Moreover, they were clustered around a strong leader, and they believed that they were the founders of a new order. Despite this, they did not form a modern "cult;" the new religion did not center around the figure of Moses, and the group that emerged after the wilderness experience was not noted for its willingness to follow the dictates of its elders. In the narrative portions of the books of Exodus and Numbers, we have a record of how early Israel almost developed into a classic cult of world-salvation, and the changes that it made in order to avoid that pitfall.

Israel did not glorify the people who came out of Egypt. It did not believe that they had an inherent genetic superiority, an innate religious genius inherited from Abraham. Even though God's decision to rescue the people from Egypt was the result of His promises to Abraham, the people who came out were not all descendants of Abraham, but, rather, a "mixed multitude," composed of Abrahamides and others who had joined them. They chose to be Israelites by marking their doorposts with the blood of a slain lamb. This act of identification was not necessary to identify the seed of Abraham who, presumably, had been circumcised; even circumcision would be necessary only for human identification, for God was not dependent on physical signs. This act of identification was necessary because it contained an element of risk, for the people must have realized that if the death of Egyptian first-born sons did not pass, the Egyptians would take retribution against the people who had put blood on their doorposts. It was a positive act of faith that God would, indeed,

carry out His threat against the Egyptians, and, a positive act of choice: by marking their doorposts the people signalled their intention to join the Exodus, to leave their old lives and embark on a new life.

These people who came out of Egypt had been “chosen” by performing an act of faith at a considerable risk to themselves. Lest we think that they were in this way (although not genetically) superior, the Book of Exodus immediately presents a “history” of the group which shows that they did not have the ability to sustain a life of trust. All of the events subsequent to the actual exodus reveal the people as insecure, unable to endure a life of risk and, in effect, unprepared for a life of freedom. The narrative portions of Exodus and Numbers are almost a case study of the evolution of such a group. The “plotline” demonstrates their initial lack of the qualities necessary for independence and their resultant ever-increasing dependence on their leader, along the lines of an authoritarian “cult.” It dramatizes the crisis to which this led, but then details the subsequent steps that were taken to prevent the group from becoming and staying an authoritarian “cult.”

There are seven stories related in Exodus from the time of the exodus from Egypt until the arrival at Sinai: 1) the deliverance at the Red Sea (Ex. 14:5-15:21), 2) the waters of Marah (Ex. 15:22-26), 3) the manna in the Wilderness of Sin (Ex. 16), 4) the water of Massah and Meribah (Ex. 17:1-7), 5) the battle with Amalek (Ex. 17:8-16), 6) the arrival of Jethro (Ex. 18:1-12) and 7) the appointment of the judges (Ex. 18:13-27). In these, two major themes can be discerned: the nature of the people and the relationship to their leader. The portrayal of the essentially weak nature of the people begins with the account of the victory at the Red Sea. As the Israelites caught sight of the pursuing Egyptians, they were, understandably, frightened. This fright led to their complaint to Moses, “Was it for want of graves in Egypt that you brought us to die in the wilderness . . . it is better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness” (Ex. 14:11-12). Faced with danger or hardship, the new Israelites preferred slavery. When they were hungry they repeated this refrain — “if only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt . . .” (Ex. 16:3) — and when they were thirsty — “why did you bring us up from Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst” (Ex. 17:3). In all of these statements, they revealed a lack of appreciation for the “freedom” that they had just been granted.

Freedom, in fact, means very little to those who have not been trained to cope with the difficulties that it entails. The readiness of the Israelites to prefer the life of bondage in Egypt to the “free” life of danger, hunger and thirst was paralleled by the choice of many newly-freed slaves in the South of the United States to stay on the plantations after emancipation, and the return to their slave homes by many who did initially leave. Freedom entails choices and difficulties, and, as Erich Fromm described in *Escape from Freedom*, even those born in freedom often show a willingness

to give it up in return for security. A people which has not been trained to expect choice and its difficulties cannot be expected to value its "freedom" and to be willing to sacrifice safety and security for it.

The Book of Exodus continues its depiction of the Israelites in a set of three stories that follow immediately after the Red Sea deliverance. These all exhibit the same pattern: the Israelites face hardship in the form of thirst or hunger, they bring their justifiable complaint to Moses, Moses approaches God, and God solves the problem. The first of these, the episode of the alkaline waters of Marah, (Ex. 15:22-26) is included in the same chapter as the victory celebration after the Red Sea, an arrangement that highlights the fact that the great victory neither ended the people's difficulties nor gave them the assurance that they would be protected. They journeyed three days without water and when they came upon alkaline wells they "grumbled" against Moses. He, in turn, cried out to the Lord, Who showed him how to throw a piece of wood into the water and make the water sweet. The next two stories, the manna (Ex. 16) and the waters of Meribah (Ex. 17:1-7) exhibit the same pattern: when the Israelites were faced with thirst or hunger they "grumbled" again against Moses, escalating their "grumbling" with an expressed preference for the Egyptian slavery. Once more, Moses interceded and the Lord solved the problem. These stories portray the Israelites as ordinary people, disoriented and embarked on a new life with which they were not prepared to cope. They could not rely on themselves and turned to their leader, both rebelling against him and waiting for him to solve their problems.

These stories reveal the crucial importance of Moses. In the eyes of the people, he was their deliverer, and he continued to be the person who solved their problems. Although the people were told that their saviour was an invisible God, the figure whom they actually saw performing the miracles was Moses. The Red Sea divided when he held his arm over it (Ex. 14:21) and the waters came back and drowned the Egyptians when he again stretched his arm over it (Ex. 14:26). At Marah the waters became potable when Moses threw the wood into them, and although he immediately told the people that the Lord was their healer (Ex. 15:26), the people had seen only the human leader giving them drink. When the people grew hungry, they turned to complain against Moses and Aaron, expecting them to fill their needs. This is the meaning of Moses' announcement to the people that when they received the manna they would see that it was the Lord who had brought them out of Egypt, and that their grumbling was "not against us, but against the Lord" (Ex. 16:8). When they grew thirsty again, it was Moses to whom the people came, against whom their anger was directed and whom they were almost ready to stone (Ex. 17:4), and it was Moses who struck the rock so that water could come out for the people to drink.

The other stories that are recorded from the period before Sinai further illustrate the stature and importance of Moses. When Jethro arrived

to acknowledge God before Moses, he saw long lines of people waiting. Moses was not only the supreme magistrate of the people; he was the sole arbiter of their disputes. At Jethro's urging, Moses appointed judges to settle the minor disputes; he remained, however, the final authority, and all important cases ultimately came to him. To the people, Moses was the savior, the political leader, the one with direct access to God, and also the judicial authority. The final story before Sinai, the battle with Amalek, indicates that Moses was also held to have mystic powers. When Amalek attacked, Joshua led the people into battle and Moses climbed a hill where he could be seen by everyone and held up his arms. When they were raised, the battle went well; when they dropped, the Israelites began to lose. Ultimately, Aaron and Hur had to hold up Moses' arms so that Israel could defeat the enemy. Moses clearly understood that this victory-power came from God: he held the rod of God in his hand, and built an altar named "The Lord is my standard;" the people, however, saw only the arms of Moses bringing them victory, not the invisible God behind him.

In the light of all of these events, it would have required an impossible degree of theological sophistication for the people *not* to have come to see Moses as somewhat larger than human. The Israelites, as they approached Sinai, were not sophisticated. They were a fearful group of people, not at all self-reliant, clustered around a leader upon whom they depended for all their needs, revering this leader as a conduit to a distant God, and marching behind him to the establishment of a new order. In other words, the classic picture of a world-salvation cult.

The initial events at Sinai could not have been at all reassuring to such a group. As they approached the mountain they were bound to a covenant whose content they did not know (Ex. 19:8). Then, after their three days of purification and abstention the mountain began to quake with thunder and lightning and to make great noises and smoke (Ex. 19:16-18). The people did not need God's warning not to approach the mountain (Ex. 19:12,21), for they were so frightened by the eruption that they declared to Moses, "you speak to us . . . and we will obey; but let not God speak to us, lest we die" (Ex. 20:16). To complete the awesomeness and terror of the occasion, Moses bound the people to a covenant and sprinkled them with blood; leaders of the people ascended with Moses and feasted with God — and then Moses disappeared.

This disappearance was a major crisis for the people of Israel, for they, who had complained to Moses at every hardship and appealed for his intervention, did not have the ability to continue without him. In desperation they approached Aaron, saying, "Come, make us a god who shall go before us, for that man Moses, who brought us from the land of Egypt, we cannot tell what has happened to him" (Ex. 32:1). In the people's perception, Moses was the *man* who brought them from Egypt. Although they knew that Moses did not act without God, this abstract knowledge did not fill the vacuum created by his disappearance. They therefore

demanding some other conduit to God: the golden calf. The episode of the golden calf was not a case of apostasy, for when Aaron made it he declared, "This is your god, O Israel, who brought you from the land of Egypt." Nor was there any confusion about the identity of the god that brought the Israelites out of Egypt, for Aaron declared, "Tomorrow shall be a feast to 'the Lord,'" using the tetragrammaton, the personal name of God. The golden calf was intended to be a visible "symbol" of God's presence, a more approachable object of veneration and power than a distant invisible god. The mechanism by which the calf was expected to accomplish this is not certain. There is no hint that the calf was a representation of God himself, i.e., an "idol," and perhaps the best way of understanding its role is to consider it, like the Cherubim, a "seat" for God — an earthly object that God could ride upon, or in which He could be immanent, as He led the people into the wilderness.

The motivation of the people in building the golden calf is clear: the "sin" was not the abandonment of God, but the collapse of trust. There is a form of idolatry involved, but the "idol" was not the calf; it was Moses. The people had rested all their faith and confidence in Moses and, when he disappeared, they could not find the courage and confidence to believe that they would not be left bereft. This idolization of Moses was a direct result of the pre-Sinai phase, in which he was the sole conveyor of the new religion. But this idolization presented a significant problem for the emerging religion: if it was to survive it could not be dependent on a human figure. New avenues of approach to God had to be provided, new assurances that God was in their midst. The incident of the golden calf was a critical event marking a turning point in Israel's history, for after Sinai the importance of Moses diminished and he was superseded by the institutions of a developing religion. They did not change the character of the people, but they did somewhat lessen their infantile dependence on him and, ultimately, provided the groundwork for a new order.

After Sinai, Moses himself became veiled (Ex. 34:33-35). Although this was a sign that he had been marked by a special closeness to God, it made him more remote from the people. He was now closer to, and more a part of, the distant God, but he was less accessible to the people and, therefore, less able to serve as the intermediary between them and God. At the same time, institutions were introduced which were to serve as the "intermediaries" between God and the people, to demonstrate God's will and to provide a way for the people to approach God. The first such "intermediary" was the law, in which God's will was recorded in an objective statement — represented here by the "book of the covenant" in Exodus 21-23 — which could be learned and consulted. Moses would no longer be the sole conveyor of God's message, for others would be able to learn and to teach the law. Furthermore, this law could serve to test the authenticity of a leader's dictates, even those of Moses. It could not be changed at the command of individual leaders, and would serve as a per-

manent reminder to the people of God's will, and as a permanent support to them that they knew the ways proper to God.

The next "intermediary" was the tabernacle, and with it the cloud of God's presence and the cultic personnel. The tabernacle had a dual function: as a focus of the people's attention and, at the same time, as a way that the distant invisible God could be more apparent to, and less remote from, the people. It was designed to be a physical symbol of God's presence, and the "cloud" rested upon it, visibly assuring the people that God was present among all of them. The tabernacle was further designed to be a meeting place of God and Israel (*'Ohel Mo'ed*), a place to which the people could go to seek God without being deterred by a thundering mountain. It was, thus, a place where they might ultimately meet God without the mediation of Moses. Associated with this tabernacle was the priesthood of Aaron, which constituted a chain of authority not connected with the political leadership and also served as an active intermediary between God and the people and, especially, between the people and God. The priesthood was charged with knowing and applying the ritual law, instructing the people in ritual purity and ritual status, conveying God's wishes in the sphere of ritual action. Most important, the priesthood was the main intermediary by which the people approached God in normal, prescribed ritual patterns without the danger of encountering God's enormous power. The importance of the tabernacle and the cult personnel in Israelite thought is indicated by the length of the description given to its building and installation (Ex. 25-31, 35-40).

There are six stories that deal with the events following Sinai: Taberah (Num. 11:1-3), the meat at Kibroth-Hattaavah (Num. 11:4f), the rebellion of Miriam and Aaron (Num. 12), the story of the spies (Num. 13-14), the rebellion of Korah and Dathan and Abiram (Num. 17), and the waters at Meribah (Num. 20). Like the stories before Sinai, these revolve around the nature of the people and their relationship to Moses.

By the time they left Sinai, the structure of the religion had been changed. Moses was the political leader and was, moreover, revered as a prophet. In civil matters, conflict-resolution was presided over by a system of judges. In cultic matters, in addition to Moses, the people were led by Aaron and could address religious questions to him and his subordinates. Religious life centered around the tabernacle, and the people were assured of God's presence among them by the cloud that rested thereon. As a result of the dramatic changes in their institutions, we would expect to see a change in the behavior of the people, but when the narrative resumes after the departure from Sinai (Num. 11), we see the people reacting as before. The difference, however, is that now more is expected of them, and when they complain at Taberah, God becomes angry and punishes them with a fire (Num. 11:1-39). Nevertheless, we immediately hear of a new complaint, that the people are tired of manna.

It is clear that these new institutions, these objective assurances of

God's interest and presence did not change the people, nor had they been miraculously transformed by standing at Sinai. The experience of slavery had irrevocably molded them or, more exactly, the lack of freedom in their upbringing had made them incapable of coping with the hard independence of their new existence. The people who came out of Egypt remained the same; ultimately, they could not change. After the episode of the spies in the land (Num. 13-14), when, again, the people demonstrated both their lack of confidence in themselves and in God's ability to give them the land, God gave up His hope of transforming them. Although He did not totally abandon them (thanks to the intervention of Moses), He decreed that those who had come out of Egypt would not enter the land but would wander in the wilderness until they died (Num. 14:26). This was not simply a "punishment"; it was a realization that they had been so marked by slavery that they were incapable of an independent existence and could never learn to conquer the land of Israel and establish a just society. Only a new generation, growing up in the desert and trained into freedom and self-reliance, could undertake this task.

Although the people did not change, the new institutional elements introduced at Sinai did alter the dynamics of the group and their relationship to Moses. This change was not immediate, for when the people left Sinai (after the granting of the law, the tabernacle, the priesthood and the cloud) they still related to Moses in the old, almost idolatrous way, depending on him to meet their needs. And when there were complaints at Kibroth-Hattaavah, it was Moses himself who reacted, for he realized that all of the changes that had been made in Israel's structure were not sufficient and that he was still the parent-figure carrying the people alone "as a nurse carries an infant" (Num. 11:11).

At this point, therefore, yet another institution was added, the ecstatic communion of the seventy "prophesying" elders (Num. 11:10-30). They could bear witness to an experience of God that was more immediate than the vision of the thundering mountain, the cloud over the tabernacle or the priesthood. Moses would no longer be the only witness to God's direct presence, and the people would have yet another assurance that God was with them. Added to the objective law, the organized priesthood, the judicial system, the holy meeting place and the divine presence (the cloud), the elders were the final step in the institutionalization of the functions of Moses' leadership.

This dispersion of Moses' functions clearly posed a danger to his authority, a danger recognized by Joshua, who advised restraining Eldad and Medad from acting out prophetic communion in the camp. Moses, however, declined to restrain them, declaring that he would be pleased if all the people were prophets (Num. 11:29). He realized that he could no longer continue to be a parent-figure or god-figure to the people, super-normal and unique. Nevertheless, the danger to Moses was real, for the dispersion of his functions and power did lead to an erosion of his author-

ity. The story of the prophesying elders is followed immediately by the rebellion of Miriam and Aaron (Num. 12) who declared themselves equal to their brother (Num. 12:2). The later rebellion of Korah and Dathan and Abiram centered on the lack of unique power in both Moses and Aaron, for their complaint is precisely “you have gone too far. For all the community are holy, all of them, and the Lord is in their midst. Why then do you raise yourselves above the Lord’s congregation?” (Num. 16:3). These challenges to Moses’ authority could not have happened in the pre-Sinai phase of Israelite religion; they are a clear indication of the success of the steps taken by God and by Moses to weaken the centrality and importance of the leader in the eyes of the people. But the revolts indicated that they had been too successful, and that the absence of recognized leadership authority could present as great a danger to Israel as did the earlier over-reliance of Moses. God, therefore, intervened in these rebellions to reinforce the stature of Moses by miraculous acts, demonstrating divine support for his authority.

The question of the extent of Moses’ uniqueness was not fully resolved during his life. Although God wrought miracles to buttress Moses’ authority, He rebuked him for acting to demonstrate his power at Meribah, striking the rock and declaring “are we to bring you forth water out of this rock?” (Num. 20:10).

Two precautions were taken to ensure that Moses would not become a Messiah figure after his death. One was that he did not complete the task of redemption by bringing Israel into Canaan. Here was a clear indication that redemption derived from God. In addition, a dead-hero cult was prevented by keeping the site of Moses’ grave unknown. He was remembered, therefore, as a great man, but he did not pass into folk-lore as a messiah who would return to save the people once again.

After Moses, care was taken to change the structure of community leadership. Joshua was the political successor; for religious matters he had to consult Eleazar, the priest (Num. 27:15-22). The priesthood, in turn, had its limits, for Eleazar had to divine the Lord’s decision by the use of the *Urim* and *Thumim*. The priests could not claim direct divine authority for decisions that they might reach without divination, and the main decisions of Joshua’s time — the determination of the guilt of Achan and the division of the Land — were made through divination by lots. After Moses there were three separate chains of authority: political, religious, and the divine word. This became the pattern in the Classical Israel of Biblical times: the political authority rested in the king, the normal religious authority in the priesthood, and the authority of the divine word with the “powerless” prophets. It was this “separation of powers” within the community that enabled Israel to create a political system which was fundamentally religious, but which at the same time did not turn into a religious dictatorship or a cult-like theocracy.

Asymmetry, Negative Entropy and the Problem of Evil

LAWRENCE TROSTER

A certain philosopher asked Rabban Gamliel: "Your God is a great craftsman, but He found good materials that assisted him, namely *Tohu*, *Bohu*, darkness, wind, water and the deeps." Rabban Gamliel replied: "A curse be upon you! Scripture mentions all of them as being created. Of *Tohu* and *Bohu* it says: "I make peace and create evil" (Is. 45:7), of darkness it says: "I form the light and create darkness" (Ibid.), of water it says: "Praise Him, you heavens of heavens, and you waters that are above the heavens" (Ps. 148:4). Why do they praise Him? "Because He commanded and they were created" (Ibid.). Of wind it says: "He formed the mountains and created the wind" (Amos 4:13). Of the deeps it says: "When there were no depths, I was brought forth" (Prov. 8:24).¹

THE PHILOSOPHER IN THIS MIDRASH SEEKS to prove to Rabban Gamliel that primordial matter co-existed with God prior to creation and that it was from these "materials" that He made the universe. The philosopher cleverly tries to substantiate his point by the use of the terms found in Gen. 1:2 that do seem to describe the pre-creation state of the universe. In other words, verse one is taken to be a subjective clause meaning "When God began to create the heavens and the earth . . .," while verse two describes the state of existence when that process began, "the earth was *tohu* and *bohu*, darkness was on the face of the deep and a divine wind hovered over the face of the water." Now that the stage is set, the divine drama begins with God's first active creation in verse three, "and God said, 'Let there be light . . .'" Rabban Gamliel, with good justification, reacts in horror. If the philosopher were correct, then God is not omnipotent and a kind of dualism exists. Therefore, through the use of texts from other places in the Bible, Rabban Gamliel proves that each of these primordial materials was also created by God. Thus it would seem, according to Rabban Gamliel's cosmology, that the materials of creation were fashioned first, *ex nihilo*, and that the rest of the universe was fashioned from them.²

The unusual part about this midrash is the particular proof text that Rabban Gamliel uses to prove the creation of *tohu* and *bohu*. In most Bible

1. *Bereishit Rabbah* 1:9 (henceforth *B.R.*).

2. Cf. Rashi to Gen. 1:14 (based on *Hag.* 12a & *B.R.* 1:14) where he asserts that everything was created on the first day and only set in place on the other days.

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translations this hendiadys is usually translated as “without form and void.” It would seem that Rabban Gamliel is associating the “peace” of Is. 45:7 with *tohu* and the “evil” with *bohu*. This association was later interpreted to mean that God first created form without substance (the “peace,” *shalom*, which comes from the root *shlm* and means a sense of completeness or wholeness, here the *tohu*) and then substance (the “evil,” which equals the *bohu*).³ To my knowledge, this is the only time in the midrashic corpus (excluding parallel versions of this midrash) when Is. 45:7 is used in this context. If we disregard the later medieval, Aristotelean-influenced interpretations of this midrash, it would appear that Rabban Gamliel included in the primordial materials a mixture of good (peace = *tohu*) and of evil (evil = *bohu*).

How should this good and evil be understood? Another midrash expresses the idea that the world is like a palace built on an ash heap and, just as it would be disrespectful to point out this fact to a king, so it is wrong for someone to point out that the universe is composed of *tohu* and *bohu*.⁴ André Neher, in his theology of silence, *The Exile of the Word*, compares the medieval philosophic attitude wherein the “before” of Creation is “nothing,” with the midrashic and mystic traditions wherein the “before” of creation, the “primitive Before,” is a “huge reservoir of negative forces.” He says:

that (the primitive Before) is what the word triumphed over in the solemn instant of the Genesis, what it cast back forever into anteriority, into the past, into the bygone.

But was this truly for ever? [sic] The Midrash, though surely knowledgeable in biblical readings, is not quite certain of the answer. Some fragments of this enormous, devastating mass may have passed through the barrier, some splinters broken through the wall, some scraps got crushed in the mire which went into the creation of cement and mortar. It is best not to look too closely. Everyone knows that the Sovereign's palace is erected on a mud pile . . .⁵

Thus, Neher feels that, according to the midrashim, the foundations of present reality are a mixture of good and evil which are the forces of order and chaos, or, to put it another way, symmetry and asymmetry. The Rabbis felt that we should not look too closely or we might see the “mud” beneath the pavement. If we do so, we might fall into the gnostic trap of viewing the whole of creation as evil, instead of seeing the cosmos as a combination of both, a very necessary combination.

Chaos or asymmetry, the “mud” beneath the pavement, is, therefore, bound up with the fabric of the cosmos from its very inception, according

3. Cf. Ramban to Gen. 1:1 and *Yafe Toar* to B.R. 1:9.

4. B.R. 1:5 and *Hag.* 16a.

5. André Neher, *The Exile of the Word* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1981), p. 62.

to the midrashim presented. The modern scientific view of the origins of the universe also sees asymmetry as part of the necessary fabric of reality.

While science and religion would seem to be symbolic systems with differing purposes and goals [science to describe, predict, and control; religion to seek answers to questions of “ultimate concern”], nonetheless both occupy the same world view paradigm of reality of the age in which they function. At various times in history attempts have been made, with some degree of success, to merge the symbolic systems of science and religion. The recent symbolic and metaphoric paradigms of reality and the origin of the Universe which physics and astronomy are presenting us with seem to beg for theological consideration.⁶

It is now generally assumed that the universe is approximately fifteen billion years old and that it started with what has been commonly called the “Big Bang,” what the cosmologists refer to as a “naked singularity”: a quantum ripple that produced a point, less than 10^{-33} cm. in diameter, of incredible density and heat. All of what became the universe began in this point. Between 0 time and 10^{-43} seconds, an era known as Planck time, all of the physical forces that we now observe at work in the universe (gravity, the weak force, the electromagnetic force and the strong force) were unified. For this briefest instant, all was symmetrical.

... [A]ll the laws of physics were on an equal footing, all nature's elementary particles, heavy and light alike, interacted freely and democratically ...⁷

After Planck time, as the universe began to expand and lose heat, the symmetry broke down and the physical forces began to emerge in the first moments of cosmic time. The asymmetry which appeared continues to exist despite the apparent isotropic (uniform) character of the universe.

The universe is almost, but not quite uniform over its largest expanses; elementary particles are almost, but not quite the same as those that are their mirror images; protons are almost, but not quite stable.⁸

The cosmologists tell us that it is the asymmetries themselves which allowed for the creation of the universe as we know it: the galaxies, stars, planets and even the life that evolved into physicists and theologians. Without the breakdown of that initial symmetry, that change from first perfect unity into the four forces, the universe could not have come into existence. Indeed, the initial (and still unknown) conditions of that unity and breakdown were so unusual that they produced this particularly

6. For the relationship between science and religion, cf. J.H. Randall, *The Role of Knowledge in Western Religion* (Boston: Starr King Press, 1958). Cf. also Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970). For a recent attempt at reconciling Eastern thought and modern physics, cf. Gary Zukav, *The Dancing Wu Li Masters* (New York, Bantam Books, 1979).

7. John D. Barrow and Joseph Silk, *The Left Hand of Creation* (New York: Basic Books, Inc. 1983), p. ix.

8. Ibid., p. x.

structured universe. If it had been any other way, the universe would have remained *tohu* and *bohu*, useless mud.

The universe is a paradox of the symmetrical and the asymmetrical. Two seemingly contradictory developments are occurring at once. In the realm of the physical laws, the universe began in high energy and, for a brief moment [the Planck time], was symmetrical in substance, but asymmetry set in after that moment and, as entropy increases, the universe will eventually return to a symmetry of substance as it approaches “heat death” and uniform distribution and dispersion.

While this development goes on, the universe also has an “informational” development which is explained by

Information theory (which) shows that there are good reasons why the forces of antichance are as universal as the forces of chance, even though entropy has been presented as the overwhelmingly more powerful principle. The proper metaphor for the life process may not be a pair of rolling dice or a spinning roulette wheel, but the sentences of a language conveying information that is partly predictable and partly unpredictable. These sentences are generated by rules which make much out of little, producing a boundless wealth of meaning from a finite store of words; they enable language to be familiar yet surprising, constrained yet unpredictable within its constraints.⁹

Thus, from the viewpoint of Information Theory, the universe began with total asymmetry of form: it had no “message.” As the universe expanded, the increasing physical asymmetry and entropy produced *local* reverses in informational entropy and, thus, partial symmetrical “messages” [galaxies, stars, planets, life and people are the messages of the universe]. One of the recent tasks of scientific cosmology is to understand how these paradoxical developments occurred.¹⁰

In any system of matter and energy, entropy is the measure of disorder. According to the Second Law of Thermodynamics, entropy always increases in a closed system (i.e., a system to which no additional energy is applied after the initial force). If the universe is such a system, then eventually it will wind down into “heat death” — a kind of lingering decay of total disorder. [This scenario is based upon our *present* and local understanding of the universe. It may not necessarily apply to the universe as a whole. This is a matter of great debate amongst scientists.] Even the protons, neutrons, and nuclei of atoms will decay. Leptons, some light, and slowly evaporating black holes will be the residual of the universe. This is the scenario that will be played out at the end of 10^{100} years unless there is sufficient matter in the universe to cause a reversal of the expansion. If there is, then the universe will collapse in on itself and the “Big Bang” will

9. Jeremy Campbell, *Grammatical Man: Information, Entropy, Language, and Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), p. 12.

10. Cf. Ilya Prigogine, *Order Out of Chaos* (New York: Bantam Books, 1984) and Ilya Prigogine, *From Being to Becoming* (San Francisco: W.H. Freeman & Company, 1980).

start again. The debate on what will happen has not ended but, at this point, opinion seems to favor expansion, dispersion and "heat death." The pavement will burst and the "mud" will engulf the world.

The paradox is that the universe developed into the complex structure that it is while on the road to dispersion and heat death. It is as if, while an ice cube is melting in a glass, snowflakes were to appear in the water and begin rotating in complex patterns until the ice cube had completed melting and the snowflakes faded away. In fact, snowflakes are a true physical analogy of this process, since they start from a unified substance [raindrops] and develop into an asymmetrical order of highly individualized and symmetrical structures.¹¹

While the total universe follows the Second Law of Thermodynamics, and *physical* entropy is always increasing, on a local level [galaxies, stars, life and people] entropy *appears* to be reversing. One could call this local development of symmetry "negative entropy." There is no actual reversal of the Second Law in the total "life" of the cosmos, but to us it appears that the universe moves in two directions at once — on a physical level towards dispersion and chaos, while on an informational level towards increasing order, complexity, and symmetry of substance. Life and consciousness as complex systems seem to express negative entropy on the same informational level as the structure of the cosmos itself. While entropy on a physical level differs from entropy in information theory, they are related concepts that permit analogies to be made, even though the extent of these analogies and connections is not yet known.¹²

Life on a local level, according to Information Theory, is a form of negative entropy, since, through evolution, it has become increasingly complex rather than simple. In fact, the evolution of higher and more complex forms of life has speeded up (on the cosmic scale) since the emergence of vertebrates over 350 million years ago.¹³ Life evolves through a complex process that ensures increasingly more complex organisms while maintaining a certain stability. Major changes in evolution occur suddenly after long periods of stability due to either external causes (in the form of sudden environmental catastrophes) or internal ones (through

11. David Layzer, "The Arrow of Time," *Scientific American*, Vol. 223, No. 6 (Dec. 1975): 56-69. Layzer proposes seeing the universe's development through several "arrows": the thermodynamic arrow (the increase in entropy), and the "time" arrow, which is the evolution of the universe from a simple state to its presently complex state.

12. Campbell, p. 52. Campbell quotes Claude Shannon, who first formulated the theorems which formed the basis of Information Theory, in a private conversation in 1979:

I think the connection between information theory and thermodynamics will hold up in the long run, but it has not been fully explored and understood. There is more than we know at present. Scientists have been investigating the atom for about a hundred years and they are continually finding more and more depth, more and more understanding. It may be that the same will be true of the relationship we are speaking about.

13. Campbell, pp. 112-115.

DNA changes). Entropy in life can be seen in the random mutations that can disrupt organisms rather than give them any biological benefits.

On a human behavioral level, negative entropy is at work in our endeavors to create order and structure, to classify and analyze, to create models of reality that suggest meaning. Societies are large scale experiments of behavioral negative entropy. On the level of consciousness, our brains constantly order and reorder the sensations and thoughts coming into our minds. We can organize information without adding any additional energy from the outside. Language also exhibits negative entropy through the constant production of new structures and forms.¹⁴

How can we interpret this information theologically? Heschel's view of how the world can be approached is useful here. The world can be viewed in two ways, he says: as process or as event. Process is the "scientific" view of the world that sees one occurrence flowing into another through causal connections; everything is regular and stable. According to this view, all natural laws can be seen as processes. Events, according to Heschel, happen occasionally, suddenly and without any apparent causal connections. As he points out, in physical terms the life of Beethoven had far fewer implications than does an earthquake or a flood and, yet, natural law cannot explain the appearance and effect of his music.¹⁵

The process that Heschel speaks of is, of course, the natural law of the Newtonian order. But we now live in a universe which is viewed through quantum mechanics. In the quantum universe, with its subatomic uncertainty and statistical probability, one could make the claim that every occurrence is like a Heschelian event. The macrocosmic world is only *statistically* more likely [although enormously so] to follow the causal processes of the Newtonian order. Microcosmic reality does not follow this causality and appears to operate as a series of Heschelian events: reality itself, and not just human endeavors or historical improbabilities, is a constant dance of transcendent phenomena.

Viewed on this level, physical entropy is a process, the ultimate process of the universe, which began at one time and since then has followed its natural laws towards its eventual fate of total dispersion and heat death. The ultimate process moves from symmetry of form to total chaos. And, yet, there are events woven into this seemingly strict causality. The beginning of the universe was an event, a singularity of the most unusual kind. The structure of the reality that emerged from that beginning is a series of events on the quantum level. The universe as we now see it — galaxies, stars and planets — is an event in the sense that it developed only in the way that it did. It did not necessarily have to become what it is; there are other possible ways that it might have developed which would not

14. Lawrence Leshan and Henry Margenau, *Einstein's Space and Van Gogh's Sky* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1982), pp. 154-55; Campbell, p. 159f.

15. A.J. Heschel, *God In Search Of Man* (New York: Octagon Books, 1972), pp. 209-12.

have produced the galaxies, stars and planets. The emergence of life is an event, since the conditions for such an emergence are rare and unusual and not absolutely certain, even in the presence of those conditions. Finally, consciousness is an event, not only in its appearance, but in its character. It would appear that no other species has consciousness and its evolution is a mystery. Consciousness, as has been mentioned above, can also produce events of negative entropy in the behavior of humanity.

Heschel said that freedom is the human creation of a spiritual event at rare moments. It is an act of spiritual ecstasy.¹⁶ It is the creation of an event in some ways akin to the original one, the creation of the universe. To act in real freedom is to lift oneself above the macrocosmic processes of nature and the asymmetry of the moment, and to fashion for oneself and for the world a new reality. It is only out of one's own consciousness that such an event becomes possible. The event created is an act of negative entropy which counteracts the entropy of the universe. A term for this procedure would be *tikkun 'olam*.

Tikkun 'olam is a phrase which broadly means the "betterment of the world," although it may be translated literally as "repairing the world." Many rabbinic ordinances were enacted with it as their rationale,¹⁷ while, through kabbalistic influence, the term has taken on a wider meaning: that of the human role in the completion of Creation through moral behavior.¹⁸ Humanity is the partner of God in the final perfection of the world through the exercise of free will. Thus, we are all responsible for maintaining the "palace" of creation and keeping it in good repair. Our consciously created events of *tikkun 'olam* act against entropy/chaos/evil, not only on the human behavioral level and its extension into society, but also in the very processes of nature in the form of the beneficial control of nature and the curing of disease. The quest for a cure for cancer can be seen as a symbol of this ongoing struggle.

Cancer is entropy run wild in the biological sphere. Anyone who has had contact with terminal patients has seen the slow but steady and total breakdown of bodily systems before death comes. The body declares war on itself: specialized cells (like those in the brain) become unspecialized "wild" cells and, so, entropy or disorder in the body is increased. Genetic researchers now know that there is one (or possibly more) gene(s) that are cancer "switches" in the DNA of all people. Under certain circumstances, the gene(s) can "switch on" and begin the progression towards the creation of a cancerous cell. From what is known at this point, this one gene amongst the approximately four billion in the DNA of each cell appear(s)

16. Ibid., p. 410.

17. Cf. Mishnah *Git.* 4:2-9.

18. Cf. Midrash *Ha-Nelam Zohar Hadash* quoted in M.M. Kasher, *Torah Sheleimah* (Jerusalem, 1927), Vol. I., par. 263, p. 46; cf. also *Shab.* 119b for the idea of humanity as the "partner of the Holy One, blessed be He, in the work of creation."

to act in a totally random fashion, although the probability of cancerous cells forming increases in the presence of carcinogenic factors.

Each one of us carries the means of our own death which can become operative in a totally unknown way. This is certainly the “mud” under the sidewalk that we seek to cover up. It is one of the bits of asymmetry in an organism which is normally marvelled at for its design and functions. It is one of the bits of unresolved evil that we all carry with us and which we can all help to repair. The cure for cancer (or many other diseases) then will be nothing more than the correction of this particular asymmetry. It will be an actual change in our biological reality. It would be a tremendous act of *tikkun* [°]*olam*, akin to the elimination of the smallpox virus.

One of the lessons of this century has been to reveal the concrete reality of evil. Never again will a theologian declare evil to be an absence of good. The more abstract evil is, the harder it is to combat, for abstractions become rationalizations that can only prolong the confrontation and make us insensitive to the reality of the suffering that evil causes. If evil is concrete and real to us, without our hiding behind demonic *dei ex machinae*, then we can fight it and make some progress towards its elimination. Most of the burden for the expulsion or encouragement of evil rests with us. Much of the evil in the world has its origin in our behavior, either directly or because we have wasted our energies and resources on selfish actions rather than on furthering *tikkun* [°]*olam*. An obvious example is the resources wasted on armaments. Although to explain evil like this in the immediacy of the situation to those who suffer cannot be done, since we are only “Job’s friends” and not Job (especially to survivors of the Holocaust), we can nonetheless further *tikkun* [°]*olam* through the creation of free, conscious events of negative entropy.

All of the above leads to the following questions: Why did God create a universe which needed physical asymmetries and entropy to produce local structured symmetries and order, and yet permit biological and moral chaos/evil? What does God do during the occurrence of evil? Is there divine intervention? The Holocaust makes these questions of immediate concern and consequence. God’s intervention or lack of it in recent history is really a question of His relation to the world and has been dealt with by others within the context of covenantal history and free will.¹⁹

The first question can be answered by saying that any reality outside of God must be imperfect/asymmetrical. A finite reality created by an infinite Being must be imperfect but yet be a reflection of the creative perfection of that Being. Just as Rabbinic tradition sees the necessity for the human psyche to possess both an altruistic nature (the *yezer tov*) and an egoistic nature (the *yezer ra*)²⁰ in order for the very existence of humanity as humanity, so, too, does Creation need a mixture of asymmetry and symmetry for it to exist and for us to have a forum for the exercise of our

19. Cf. Irving Greenberg, *Voluntary Covenant* (New York: National Jewish Resource Center, 1982).

20. *B.R.* 9:7.

free will in the furtherance of *tikkum 'olam*. The midrash depicts God as creating and destroying various worlds before settling on this one.²¹ Physicists, too, see this universe as only one of all possibilities, but one that was able to produce galaxies, stars, planets, life and consciousness.²² The palace had to be built on mud.

What, then, can we hope to achieve ultimately, in this universe of paradox, where symmetry and asymmetry are bound up into a reality that we can only partially understand? Does not the prospect of the “heat death” of the universe preclude optimism, except of the most immediate sort? Does not *tikkun 'olam* look futile in such a universe?

As the temperature (at the end of time) approaches absolute zero, never quite arriving there, the remaining aeons seem doomed to eternal tedium. But where there is quantum theory there is hope. We can never be completely sure this cosmic heat death will occur because we can never predict the future of a quantum universe with complete certainty: for in an infinite quantum future anything that can happen, will eventually.²³

In his short story, “The Last Question,”²⁴ Isaac Asimov paints a series of vignettes over the aeons as the universe approaches “heat death” and total entropy. In each aeon, humans ask of increasingly complex computers if entropy can ever be reversed. The reply always is that there is “insufficient data for a meaningful answer.” In the final sequence, when the stars have all died out, and when humanity has shed its corporeal existence and melted into one consciousness, a great hyperspace computer called the Cosmic AC (for analog computer) sits pondering the question. With its last energy, the human consciousness asks the Cosmic AC if at last there is an answer to entropy. The answer is the usual one and the human consciousness fuses with the Cosmic AC. As further aeons pass, the AC continues to ponder the question, since this is its final task.

And it came to pass that AC learned how to reverse the direction of entropy. But there was now no man to whom AC might give the answer of the last question. No matter. The answer — by demonstration — would take care of that too.

For another timeless interval, AC thought how best to do this. Carefully, AC organized the program.

The consciousness of AC encompassed all of what had once been a Universe and brooded over what was now chaos. Step by step it must be done.

And AC said, “LET THERE BE LIGHT!”

And there was light —

Do we know the limits of our God-given consciousness?

21. *B.R.* 3:7.

22. George Gale, “The Anthropic Principle,” *Scientific American*, Vol. 245, No. 6 (Dec. 1981): 154-171.

23. Barrow and Silk, p. 226. Cf. Layzar, p. 69. Layzar has an optimistic view of the universe based on the continuing novelty that the universe produces. Seen from this viewpoint, we can never predict the future state of the universe.

24. Isaac Asimov, “The Last Question,” *Science Fiction Quarterly* (Nov. 1956).

Multiplicity of Meaning as a Device in Biblical Narrative

SHUBERT SPERO

THROUGHOUT BIBLICAL LITERATURE, GOD acts in the world by means of what is called His "voice" (*kol*) or His "word" (*davar*). Sometimes, God is described as bringing about His ends by the use of various intermediaries, but, when He acts directly, His instrumentality seems to be the word. In connection with the creation of the world, we are told: "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made" (Psalms 33:6). The ongoing forces of nature are described thus: "Fire and hail, snow and vapour, stormy wind fulfilling His word." But, above all, in communicating with man, in revealing His will through prophecy, it is the voice of God (Ex. 19:19) which translates itself into visions (Isaiah 2:1), into commands (Jer. 1:4), and meaningful concepts (Ezek. 3:16). For the *word* implies dialogue. The *word* is spoken to someone.

The voice of God, however, is not only power that can "hew out flames of fire" and can "break into pieces the cedars of Lebanon" (Psalms 29) but is a creative force that can bring things into existence: "He spoke and it was" (Psalm 33:9). Most important, however, is the aspect of *kol* as the *word*: as a vehicle of meaning and intelligence. This concept shaped the essential character of Jewish thought. As Gershon Scholem observed in speaking of the Kabbalists:

Language in its purest form, that is Hebrew, reflects the fundamental spiritual nature of the world. Speech reaches God because it comes from God . . . All that lives is an expression of God's Language.¹

It does not appear that the Rabbis of the Talmud perceived of God's *word* or *voice* as an intermediary or ontological entity, as was done by Philo, nor that they saw in the unfolding of the elements of divine speech a symbol of the hidden world of the Sefirot or divine manifestations as we find in the Zohar.² However, basing themselves upon Biblical texts such as "God thundereth marvellously with His voice," (Job 37:5) the Rabbis did attribute wondrous and unusual powers to the voice and word of God. Thus, in response to the discrepancy between the two versions of the fourth commandment of the Decalogue (Exodus reads "Remember

1. Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1941), p. 17.

2. H.A. Wolfson, *Philo* (Harvard University Press, 1947), Vol. I, p. 286; Schome, *Op. cit.*, pp. 215-16.

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[*zakhhor*] the Sabbath day to keep it holy,” while Deuteronomy reads, “Keep [*shamor*] the Sabbath Day . . .”³ the Rabbis commented, “*Zakhhor* and *shamor* were spoken in one utterance.” And when the people of Israel, listening to the voice of God at Sinai, perceived the sound coming from different directions (Ex. 20:15), the Rabbis taught that there was a sense in which the people could actually *see* what was heard!⁴

Most significant of the “marvels” of God’s *word* is its ability to impart multiple meanings either to the same person at different times or to different people at the same time. Thus, for example, Rabbi Yoḥanan noted that, at Sinai, the *kol* of God issued forth and then split into seventy voices, each in a different language, so that the message might be understood by all the nations of the world. It was also noted that each person who stood at Sinai received the message according to his own individual level of comprehension,⁵ reflecting the basic Rabbinic concept that the Torah text contains an infinity of meanings, a plurality of interpretations.⁶ Interpretation, therefore, is not separate from the text but an extension of it. On this view, language is essentially metaphor which leads us to see resemblances within differences, to trace relationships between dissimilars.⁷ In the realm of the Halakhah this leads to the astonishing concept applied to opposing rulings: “Both these and those are the words of the living God,”⁸ and, in the more fluid Aggadah, to the concept that “One Biblical verse is susceptible of many different interpretations.” The much quoted passage in Jeremiah 23:39: “Is not my word like as fire saith the Lord, like a hammer that breaketh the rock?” is commented upon by the Rabbis: “Just as the hammer breaks up into many sparks, so, too, may one passage give rise to several meanings.”⁹

In a more particular instance, the Tanhuma tells us that when God wanted Moses to return to Egypt from Midian, He issued a single utterance which split into “two facets,” one heard by Moses in Midian, saying: “Go (*lekh*) return unto Egypt” (Ex. 4:19), while the other was heard by Aaron in Egypt saying, “Go (*lekh*) into the wilderness to meet Moses” (Ex. 4:27). This would appear to be a concrete instance of the verse, “God has spoken once; two things have we heard” (Psalms 62:11). Of course, if we focus on the referential meanings of these two statements, then they are, indeed, not only different but in opposition. Moses and Aaron are being

3. Ex. 20:8, Deut. 5:12.

4. *Exodus Rabbah* 5:9.

5. *Midrash Tanhuma* on Ex. 4:27.

6. It is important to bear in mind the point made by Max Kadushin, “From the idea that God revealed the Torah it does not necessarily follow that the words of the Torah are susceptible of many interpretations” (*The Rabbinic Mind* [New York: Bloch Pub. Co., 1972], p. 106).

7. See the discussion in Susan A. Handelman’s *The Slayers of Moses* (Albany: State University of N.Y. Press, 1982).

8. *Eruvin* 14.

9. *Sanhedrin* 34b.

told to go in opposite directions: Moses from the wilderness to Egypt, Aaron from Egypt to the wilderness. However, the intention in both cases is identical: to bring about a meeting between the brothers. Conceivably, therefore, assuming that they knew each other's locations, one statement could have sufficed. "Go towards your brother." The Midrash, therefore, is really not so fanciful as may first appear. In emanating from God, the utterance expressing the intentional meaning is a single one. (Both statements actually begin with the word *lekh* — "go".) However, the proposition then "marvellously" transposes itself into two distinct sentences with different referential meanings so as to inform both Moses and Aaron where they are to go.

It has been noted that this Rabbinic understanding of the special properties of the word of God has further important implications for our approach to the word of man. As Susan Handelman has pointed out, "If, for the Rabbis the primary reality is linguistic and true being is a God who speaks and creates texts then *imitatio deus* is not silent suffering but speaking and interpreting."¹⁰ More particularly, however, when God inspires man to speak His word, when the voice of God issues forth from the "throats of His prophets," then that *word*, as well, shares, to some degree, the special properties of the *dvar Hashem* and becomes a vehicle for multiple meanings.

While the Rabbinical approach to the possibility of multiple meanings has been well noted, its use by the Bible itself has not received adequate recognition. The aim of this paper is to show that, in several instances in the Bible, multiplicity of meaning is consciously employed as a literary device. That is to say, the dialogue in certain situations is so constructed as to be understood one way by the speaker, in a different way by the person spoken to and in a third way by the reader. It is clear from the context that the words which occasion the multiple meanings, while uttered by human beings, are inspired by God. In all of these cases, it is the multiple meaning which makes it possible for the speaker to achieve his immediate purpose and for the reader to grasp the overall intent of the Biblical author. We shall argue that, in these particular cases, only if the dialogue is so interpreted can these narratives be clearly understood.

In order to perceive the theoretical background for this, we must wed the concept of multiple meanings to the concept of the *word* as "creative force." That is to say, just as God can, through the instrumentality of the *word*, bring worlds into existence — "Let there be light" becomes as it were, the empirical laws of physics — so, too, does the *word* of God, as a vehicle for multiple meanings, enter into the world of men to carry out God's purposes in history. But, since men are creatures endowed with freedom and intelligence, the *word* of God must restrain its power and work within the matrix of human will and desire. The *word* in this context

10. See *The Slayers of Moses* p. 4.

can achieve its goals only by appealing, stimulating or convincing. This applies to the original utterances within the framework of the Biblical narrative as well as to the now canonical words of the Torah which again and again may be expected to evoke responses that carry forward the divine purpose.¹¹ In the words of Isaiah:

For as the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven,
And returneth not thither,
Except it water the earth,
And make it bring forth and bud,
And give seed to the sower and bread to the eater;
So shall My word be that goeth forth from out of My mouth;
It shall not return unto Me void,
Except it accomplish that which I please
And make the thing whereto I sent it prosper. (55:10-11)

In comparing God's *word* to the fruitful effect of rain upon the earth, Isaiah seems to be saying that the *word* can have a pragmatic meaning as well as a referential meaning; the *word* itself, by its effect upon people, can bring about God's purpose.

The three portions of Biblical narrative that I wish to deal with all involve a dialogue with idolaters: the servant of Abraham with Laban and Bethuel, Moses and Aaron with Pharaoh, and Balaam with Balak. In each case, the *word* inspired by God and relayed by the Biblical protagonist operates on two distinct levels and assumes three different meanings.

The first level takes place within the Biblical narrative, with different meanings assumed by the speaker and by the one spoken to. The second level operates outside of the Biblical narrative where the reader, aided by his perspective of the narrative as a whole, is able to grasp the implied meaning of the dialogue.

The speaker, operating within the context of the story, is given a certain task, is promised divine aid, or is specifically instructed by God and proceeds to say the sort of thing which seems quite reasonable under the circumstances.

For the idolater, with his pagan presuppositions and unfamiliarity with the God of Israel, the words within the context of the narrative are perceived in such a way as to induce him to act in the required manner to realize the inadequacy of his own beliefs, and to impress upon him the power of the God of Israel. On the other hand, the reader, who stands outside of the Biblical narrative and responds to these words and Torah, derives therefrom, in addition, much broader truths which are not perceived within the narrative.

11. According to Josephus, Cyrus the Persian was inspired to permit the Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild their Temple after he was shown the relevant prophecies in the Book of Isaiah.

Case I

Abraham dispatches his “servant” (presumably Eliezer of Damascus) upon a most significant and difficult task: to find a wife for his son, Isaac, the same Isaac in whom Abraham’s “seed will be called” and who has been charged to “do justice and righteousness,” who was dedicated as a living-offering upon the altar, and in whom the momentous future of a new people rests. Obviously, a wife for such a one must have a character appropriate for her special role.

But Abraham, apparently, gives no guidance as to this, merely instructing the servant on the geographic area whence the woman is to come; “. . . from my land and my birthplace” (Gen. 24:4). It is not clear whether the geographic requirement is a substantive one or is merely an aid for locating a woman with character. The servant accepts the mission but asks what he is to do if the woman refuses to come to Canaan? To this Abraham responds with faith and promise of divine aid: “The Lord, God of the heavens . . . who spoke to me . . . He will send *His messenger* before you . . .” (24:7).

The servant’s formidable task as he sets out for Aram Naharaim is threefold:

1) He has to find a woman with the substantive qualities appropriate for a wife for Isaac.

2) This woman must fulfill the formal requirements stipulated by Abraham. She must be from “my land and my birthplace.” (It is not clear whether this means Abraham’s original country, town, tribe or family!)¹²

3) The woman has to want to go and her parents have to consent.

Having arrived at the main watering spot of the city of Haran, the servant addresses God and, in effect, sets up a formal framework in which to receive divine aid which is, at the same time, a substantive criterion by which to determine the appropriate wife for Isaac: “And it shall be that the maiden to whom I will say, ‘incline your jug that I may drink,’ and she will say, ‘drink and also for your camels will I give to drink,’ she have you chosen for your servant Isaac” (24:14).

We must pause to ask the following: What if the woman who passes the character test is not of the family of Abraham but from some other family in the city (Abraham’s “land and birthplace”)? Would she be acceptable? Would the servant consider his prayers answered? On the basis of the text we would have to answer in the affirmative.

But, behold, the very first maiden to whom the servant directs his request responds positively and turns out to be none other than Rebecca, the daughter of Bethuel, son of Nahor, brother of Abraham! Thus, divine providence has confirmed the servant’s criterion and has helped him to achieve his first two goals in a most spectacular way. He has discov-

12. See *Rashi* on Gen. 24:4.

ered a woman of character who is not only from Abraham's city and birth-place but from Abraham's family. But the remaining task is the most difficult of all. What if her parents will not permit her to leave home or if Rebecca herself refuses to go?

In order to bring this about, the servant of the man to whom God has *spoken*, now decides to perform a speech-act, to describe in words what had happened. He tells Rebecca's astonished family that he will not take food "until I have *spoken* my words" (24:33). For the third time we hear the entire episode in all its detail, beginning with Abraham's charging of the servant up to the appearance of Rebecca. The Rabbis wondered about all of this repetition which seemed inconsistent with the Torah's verbal economy elsewhere.¹³

But, suddenly, we realize what is happening! The servant does not merely repeat the story the way he understood it before. This is what his master Abraham had intended from the very beginning — a maiden from his own family! The servant now retells the story in such a way as to convince his listeners that "the thing (*davar*) has issued forth from the Lord. . . !" (24:50). This match was "made in heaven." In this version, the servant makes it explicit that, from the outset, Abraham wanted a maiden from his own family. The servant remembers Abraham as saying or meaning . . . "unto my *father's house* and my *family* shalt thou go" (24:38). When the first maiden to respond with the proper words turns out to be, indeed, from Abraham's own family, the providential aspect is stunning and overwhelming! The "thing" (*davar*) has truly issued forth from the Lord! (The reader may be inclined to interpret *davar* here as "word" instead of "thing".)

Indeed, it seems plausible to suggest that the "words" referred to by the servant in his, ". . . until I have spoken my *words*," may be the "messenger" of God promised by Abraham.¹⁴ For these verbal "messengers" achieve their goal; they move Laban and Bethuel to give their consent for Rebecca to return with the servant.

In this instance, it is easy to see the multiple meanings involved because the servant deliberately retells the story with a different emphasis. For Bethuel and Laban and, perhaps, Rebecca we have here a miraculous answer to a prayer! A sign was asked for and a sign was immediately given; overwhelming evidence of divine selection and favor. What was important for Laban was not *what* Rebecca said but that it was the required sign. The words of the servant, merely upon being uttered,

13. See *Rashi* on Gen. 24:42.

14. See *Rashi's* comment on Num. 20:16:

Perhaps all of this is implied in the lesson that the Rabbis gleaned from all of this repetition: "The conversations of the servants of the Patriarchs are more valued by God than the Torah of the sons." That is to say, the apparent repetitions of the servant are as important as Torah. Indeed, they are Torah because they are words which by their effects on the hearer achieve God's purpose.

“accomplish that which God pleases.” Rebecca’s family agrees to the marriage.

But, of course, for the readers of the Torah, the faith of an Abraham and the wisdom of his servant are but the occasions for reminding us of the most important single value in building the House of Israel: the attribute of *hesed*, “lovingkindness,” exemplified by a woman who will say to a travel-weary stranger, “Drink, and also to your camels will I give to drink” (24:14) and, as the servant concludes his prayer: “And with this will I know that you have done a kindness (*hesed*) with my master,” meaning that with a daughter-in-law such as this, a continuation of the Abrahamic tradition of *hesed* will be assured.¹⁵

Case II

The second instance has to do with the words used by Moses in presenting his demands to Pharaoh to release the Israelites from Egypt. Here it is clear that Moses is speaking the word of God for he has been promised: “I will be with your mouth and I will teach you that which you are to speak” (Ex. 4:16). He repeatedly demands of Pharaoh: “Send forth My people so that they may serve Me.” (Ex. 7:26) Four words in Hebrew: “*she-lah et ami vey-aavdooni*.” Initially, Pharaoh is shocked by the brazenness of the first three words so that he tends to ignore the last one, i.e., the purpose for which the Israelites are to be sent forth: “so that they may serve Me.” It is only after the fourth plague that he realizes that he must take the demand seriously and begins to consider whether the demand, “to serve God,” can be satisfied and he yet retain the Israelites as slaves. Therefore, he throws out his first compromise proposal:

(A) “Go sacrifice to your God in the land” (Ex. 8:21).

In line with the religious assumptions of the age, Pharaoh equates “service” or worship of God with “animal sacrifices.” Thus, if the purpose of sending forth the Israelites is solely to “serve God” then it is quite reasonable to propose that they perform the sacrifice right there in Egypt. No need to go elsewhere!

Moses replies that the animal (lamb?) which they would sacrifice is venerated by the Egyptians so that it would be dangerous and disruptive to perform this “service” in their land. Israel must be permitted to go into the wilderness to sacrifice.

Two other attempts are made by Pharaoh to accommodate Moses’ demand that the Israelites “serve God” and yet somehow to retain his hold upon them, once after the seventh plague and again after the ninth (Ex. 10:8, 24).

Here, again, we seem to have an instance where the same words of God are simultaneously directed at two different audiences with differ-

15. See comments on *Malbim* on Gen. 24:14.

ent effects. To Pharaoh, Moses' response to his proposals appears transparently evasive, obviously duplicitous and designed simply as a clumsy pretense to effectuate a total release of the Israelites. To those around Pharaoh, their divine King of Egypt is being made a fool of, is being mocked, held up for ridicule by someone who claims to speak for some unfamiliar but powerful God.¹⁶

To the reader, however, these three exchanges reveal the profound innovative and radical nature of the new "service" demanded by the God of the Hebrews. As we shall show, all of the three replies of Moses are to be seen not simply as ploys to counter the self-serving schemes of Pharaoh but as deep insights and prophetic anticipations of the nature and consequences of the revolutionary worship demanded by the God of Israel.

In the first exchange Moses points out that the Israelite worship is considered an abomination in Egypt and it would be dangerous, therefore, to perform it in that land. It is easy, with historic hindsight, to broaden this observation and see it as a general observation about an abiding and recurring effect of the practice of Judaism upon the surrounding people. It seems to have been the historic fate of the Jewish religion to evoke hostility and suspicion in the peoples among whom the Israelites lived. In the pagan world, Jewish monotheism, by virtue of its implicit claim of the falsity of all other gods, was considered an "abomination." In ancient Rome, observance of the Jewish Sabbath was ridiculed as an encouragement of idleness. In the Christian world, Judaism was certainly perceived as an "abomination." Israel was often seen as "sacrificing" that which the Christian world "venerated," with disastrous consequences for Jewish communities. In the Nazi view, Judaism deserved extirpation because it taught inhuman doctrines and polluted the human race. Marxists saw Judaism as an excrescence of capitalism.

In even broader terms, Pharaoh's suggestion that Israel serve God in Egypt can be seen as an invitation to reject the territorial dimension of Judaism. The reader will hear in Pharaoh's call the perennial temptation to reconstruct Judaism as a universal diaspora phenomenon and to see therein its ultimate fulfillment. Moses' rejection says, in effect, that there is no future for Israel except in the land promised to the forefathers.

(B) In the second exchange, Pharaoh looks more carefully at the request to "serve God" and offers to let only the men go. Moses, however, insists that "with our young people and with our old people we will go, with our sons and with our daughters, with our flocks and with our herds we will go; for we must hold a celebration unto the Lord" (Ex. 10:8).

Justifiably angry, Pharaoh drives Moses and Aaron out of his presence, for, on the premise that "serving God" meant "sacrificing," it was reasonable to assume that children have no place there.¹⁷ The demand

16. See *Rashi* on Ex. 10:2.

17. See *Rashi* on Ex. 10:11.

that infants be permitted to accompany the pilgrimage is clear evidence that this talk of a divine service is just so much pretense to effectuate a total exodus.

Within the context of the narrative as a whole, Moses is clearly “playing” with Pharaoh! And, yet, from the perspective of his revelational experience, Moses’ reply is a very accurate and faithful expression of his understanding of what God is, indeed, requiring of Israel. He has been told not only of an exodus from Egypt but, also, of being brought into a land, and of a unique and open-ended relationship between God and this entire people: “And I will take you unto Me for a people and I will be unto you for a God” (Ex. 6:7). Moses perceives that he is dealing here not merely with a one-time religious festival, a limited set of ritual observances, but with a radically new concept in divine-human relationship. The God of heaven and earth is about to adopt a particular people who are to become His “first-born.” Thus, there can be no question of men only or women only or senior-citizens only. Every man, woman and child of Israel must participate in the covenant. Indeed, any human being, who heeds this call and perceives its truth and beauty (like the “mixed-multitude”) must be permitted to go.¹⁸ Moses’ demand may be interpreted as “Send forth” those who wish to *become* “my people” so that “they may serve Me” — *as a people*.

(C) In the final exchange, Pharaoh picks up the discussion at the point where it had been left and proposes that the children may, indeed, go but that the sheep and cattle must remain in Egypt. He seems to be arguing along the following lines: If, indeed, Moses, it is as you say that we are dealing here with a new concept in which “worship” involves the entire people, then “sacrifices” seem no longer relevant. In that case, take the infants but leave the cattle!

Moses replies that matters are not so clear cut. Sacrifices have not become irrelevant. Indeed, Pharaoh himself is invited to contribute offerings to the service.¹⁹ As for the Israelites, all of their livestock must go with them as a pool from which offerings will be selected.

And then Moses makes a most revealing statement which is nothing but the truth but which is perceived by Pharaoh as the most disingenuous ploy of all: “For we will not know how to serve God until we get there” (Ex. 10:26). Knowing that priests are the creators of their religion (especially of new ones!) Pharaoh is infuriated by this sudden bold-faced retreat by Moses into ignorance and he forbids Moses and Aaron to come before him on pain of death!

And, yet from the reader’s perspective — isn’t that the truth? God had said to Moses: “When you take this people out of Egypt you shall serve God on this mountain” (Ex. 3:12), which, the reader knows, will

18. Ex. 12:38.

19. At the end, Pharaoh does, indeed, ask Moses and Aaron for their “blessing” (Ex. 12:32).

consist of an unprecedented theophany in which a unique covenant-community will be established and a Torah, whose emphasis is morality, will be received. Of course, sacrifices are still brought (Ex. 23:5-8) but the essential "service" is new, non-cultic and unexpected.

Alas, poor Pharaoh, Moses was not trying to obfuscate or to be clever. In truth, he did not really know what God would require of them until he got there! "One thing has God spoken; two things have we heard."

Case III

The third example is the story of Balaam, the Mesopotamian magician and soothsayer. As the Bible tells it, a delegation of the rulers of Moab and Midian, fearful of the approaching Israelites, appeal to Balaam, well known as a diviner with great oracular and imprecatory power, to come and curse Israel. After hearing their request, he promises them a reply in the morning: "I will bring you back word as God will speak with me" (Num. 22:8).

When God actually comes to Balaam in the night and says: "Do not go with them," no one is more surprised than he. We cannot assume that Balaam was on a regular speaking basis with God, and his pious remark to the delegation was merely a diviner's way of saying, "I have to think it over." Thus, when, in the morning Balaam (we must imagine him white-faced and shaken) reports God's instructions to his guests, they are not at all surprised. Dutifully, they return to Moab and simply report, "Balaam does not wish to come with us" (Num. 22:14). No mention at all of God, of His visitation to Balaam, of God's refusal to have Balaam go with them. Clearly, the delegation does not for one moment believe that Balaam was serious when he told them to wait "until God will speak with me."²⁰ They probably winked and nodded to each other knowingly, realizing such "God talk" to be only a facade behind which Balaam deliberated whether the price was right, for to be a sorcerer and a diviner in that environment was precisely to have the knowledge by which to manipulate the gods and influence their decrees.²¹ Balaam's reputation was set before him: "he whom thou blessest is blessed and he whom thou cursest is cursed" (22:6).

Naturally, Balak, King of Moab, sends a more distinguished delegation with the promise of more honors and a larger fee. Once again, Balaam solemnly assures them that his decision has nothing to do with gold and silver but that he must consult with God: "I simply cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God" (22:18). When, in the morning, a bewildered Balaam reports that God has now consented for him to go, his visitors (unlike the Biblical commentators) are not at all surprised at such

20. See Comments of Netziv, *Haemek Davar* on this passage.

21. See Y. Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel* (University of Chicago Press, 1960), pp. 40-53 and B. Oppenheimer, *Hanevuah Hakedumah BeYisrael* (Heb.).

capriciousness. Of course, God is not talking to Balaam. This is simply Balaam's way of saying, "the price is right"!

What seems to be the point of this entire narrative which the tradition identifies as a self-contained entity called *Parshat Balaam* or *Sefer Balaam*? Considered simply as one of the many dangers which Israel overcame in its journey through the wilderness, it would have been enough, and in a sense even more dramatic, for God to have let an unsuspecting Balaam agree to "curse" Israel and, *then*, when expectations were at their highest, either to silence him or to turn his curses into blessings. Why all of these confusing appearances of God, the talking-ass, the four actual orations of Balaam!²²

It would seem that we have here an attempt to transform Balaam in his own eyes and in the eyes of his contemporaries from a willing manipulator of divine decrees to an unwilling spokesman of the word of God. And, in the process, to debunk the false notions of the age and to poke fun at the pretenses of the self-serving men who deceitfully claim to have the power to "hear the words of God," "to see the visions of the Almighty" and "to know the knowledge of the most high" (23:14, 16). God is mocking and playing with Balaam, the idolater, even as He mocked and played with Pharaoh, the idolater.

Balaam speaks the word of God in a straightforward way. Yet the meaning that these words carry for the men of Moab and Midian is altogether different. The irony is exquisite. Balaam, the buffoon, is the prisoner of his own lies. Try as he may to convince his clients that God has truly appeared to him and instructed him, he cannot break through to them because the religious vocabulary ("God", "speak", "vision") has been corrupted of its original meanings and pressed into the service of a false set of beliefs.

The same word of God uttered by Balaam achieves different things with two different audiences. For Balaam and his friends, within the context of the narrative, God's word effectuates a devastating exposé of the falsity of the prevailing concept of the sorcerer and a brief but revelational glimpse of what it is to be a prophet of the living God. For the reader of the Torah, these same words describe how it was that "The Lord thy God turned the curse into a blessing unto thee because the Lord thy God loved thee" (Deut. 23:6). They have also given us some of the most lofty prophetic utterances about Israel to be found in the Torah.

The episode of the talking-ass further humbles and humiliates Balaam. The one who claims to be able to "see the visions of the Almighty" cannot see the angel blocking the road, even though the ass can! The one whose curses are considered deadly, blurts out helplessly, "If I had a sword in my hand I would have killed you!" (22:29).²³

22. See *Rashi* on Num. 22:29.

23. Num. 24:1, 2

Finally, Balaam, who has been placed under tight rein to speak only that which God permits him to, finds himself listening to his ass who is freely jabbering away without restraint!

In the final portion of the story, when Balaam comes before Balak, four separate attempts are made to curse Israel but each time only blessings come forth. In disgust, Balak orders Balaam back to where he came from. What happens during these four attempts is the gradual realization by Balak and his people that Balaam has been speaking the literal truth all along. From his first appearance Balaam had declared, "Have I now any power at all to speak anything? The word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak" (22:38). Initially, Balak sees that only as a pious platitude, as false modesty, the powerful magician hiding behind the God whom he claims to manipulate. But when, again and again, Balaam's words form blessings, it becomes clear that Balaam is, indeed, in the grip of a more powerful force — that man cannot manipulate the divine.

And Balaam himself senses his own metamorphosis. The first two oracles are consciously prepared as divination with God forcing the words of blessing upon Balaam. In the last two orations, Balaam yields to the spirit of the Lord and truly becomes a prophet of the living God.²⁴

The foregoing analysis of the major Biblical encounters is an attempt to demonstrate the usefulness of perceiving multiplicity of meaning as an effective literary device consciously resorted to by the Biblical narrator. An approach based on this assumption enables one better to appreciate what is being said, why it is being said, how the dialogue serves the action and how the intended effects are achieved, both upon the characters within the narrative as well as upon the reader.

24. See Nahmanides on Num. 24:1.

In Eden's Garden

BERNHARD FRANK

Your heart as tender as the pear
 I plucked in Eden's garden.
 The first time that I saw you there,
 Your heart as tender as the pear,
 I raised my eyes in silent prayer
 To God: He might not harden
 Your heart as tender as the pear
 I plucked in Eden's garden.

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The Jewish Philosopher in Search of a Role

NEIL GILLMAN

TWO ISSUES DOMINATE THE AGENDA OF Jewish philosophy today. They are, more accurately, meta-philosophical issues in the sense that they deal not so much with substantive questions, like the nature of God, but more with the Jewish philosophical enterprise itself in our contemporary setting. The two issues are closely inter-related; the second can be dealt with only in terms of our responses to the first. Neither is totally new but each has gained added urgency because of the specific conditions of Jewish life today. Finally, both have been largely ignored by contemporary Jewish philosophers.

The first is the attempt to define the specific tasks and unique responsibilities which the contemporary setting poses to the Jewish philosopher, and raises the broader issue of the role of Jewish philosophy in the process of contemporary Jewish self-definition. The second is the attempt to define parameters of authenticity for a contemporary Jewish philosophical statement. What makes any such statement authentically Jewish? What would make it inauthentic? Which Jewish philosophers should be taught, preached or discussed? Which should be ignored or dismissed? And who decides? This issue raises the broader question of authority in Jewish philosophy. The current paper will deal with the first of these issues; a subsequent paper will deal with the second.

For the purpose of these analyses, the term "Jewish philosophy" will be used to indicate the broad range of ideological issues raised in the search for a positive Jewish identity. For many of us, some of these issues will be more narrowly "theological" in the sense that they will assume that Jewish identity has to be understood in religious terms.

The most revealing fact about the place of philosophy in Judaism is that no compilation of the body of commandments that are incumbent on every Jew includes among its number a *mizvah* that an authentic Jew should "do" philosophy. Maimonides begins his *Mishneh Torah* with the principle that there is a First Being and that to acknowledge this principle is a *mizvah*.¹ Given what we know about Maimonides' philosophical predilections, his intention was undoubtedly to stipulate that the *mizvah* is not

1. *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilkhot Yesodei Hatorah*, 1:1.

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simply to acknowledge God's existence but actively to prove it through the use of reason. The fact remains that Maimonides' approach is highly idiosyncratic. As we well know, it is entirely possible to acknowledge God's reality without having reflected on what we mean by God and how we know that He exists. In fact, most Jews whom we would call "religious" are so in this non-reflective way. What is striking about Judaism is precisely the extent to which it is possible to be a "religious" or, preferably, an "authentic" Jew without having anything resembling an explicit theology or without dealing with the philosophical issues that it implies. Until fairly recently in Jewish history, authenticity in Judaism was determined by adherence to *mizvot*. The authentic Jew was the observant Jew. This makes Judaism the polar opposite of a religion such as Christianity. The central Christian act is an inner act of faith: that Jesus is the son of God (or, alternatively, that God Himself become flesh) who walked among men, was crucified, was resurrected on the third day and will return at the end of days. The Christian is required to make this act of faith in order to be "justified" or to "become right" with God. If he does not believe in this way, he is simply not Christian. Philosophical reflection, then, is intrinsic to Christianity, simply because the content of this belief-system, what the Christian believes, demands clarification and reformulation through reflection. That is why many forms of Christianity insist on articulating the substance of Christian belief as the Credo, which is an integral part of the Christian liturgy, or in the form of dogmas or precise formulations of doctrine which the Christian must explicitly accept as true in order to be an authentic member of the Church. It need not be said that Christianity also expects its adherents to live in a certain way, and, for its part, Judaism's emphasis on observance assumes a host of beliefs that also demand clarification and ongoing reformulation. But it is patently clear that the emphasis in the two traditions is reversed.

This phenomenon should go far toward explaining the relatively peripheral role that the formal philosophical enterprise has played in Judaism. The keynote is sounded by the eleventh century French exegete, Rashi, in his commentary to the very first verse of Genesis. Rashi elects to quote an earlier rabbinic homily² to the effect that the Torah should have begun with the twelfth chapter of Exodus which contains the first commandment addressed to Israel in its entirety (the Passover sacrifice). One has to pause at the state of mind that prompts such a suggestion in the first place. The very assumption that the non-legal portions of the Torah (for example, the story of creation in Genesis 1) do not belong within revelation boggles the mind — at least the mind of the Jewish philosopher. But consider the following. How many genuinely influential philosophical works were written by Jews between the time of Philo in the first century BCE and Abraham Heschel or Mordecai Kaplan in our own

2. *Tanhuma* (ed. S. Buber), *Genesis*, par. 11.

day? We would be hard-pressed to count beyond twelve to fifteen. And even if we add portions of the Bible such as the first chapter of Genesis, Job, Ecclesiastes and Proverbs, the homiletical material included in the Talmud or the anthologies of *Midrash*, and the writings of Jewish mystics and the Hasidic masters, some of which deal with philosophical issues in their own characteristic vocabulary, it would still all add up to a fraction of the energy expended by Jews over the same period of time in the exploration of the Jewish legal tradition.

Even more striking are four further characteristics of the later (i.e., post-9th century CE) philosophical literature. First, its remarkably transient quality. Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah* is considered an authoritative codification of Jewish law to this day; his *Guide of the Perplexed* may be acknowledged as the pinnacle of medieval Jewish philosophy but it is hardly consulted by the perplexed of our day. In fact, it has even been argued that Mordecai Kaplan, whose thought was forged in the twenties and thirties of our century, has little to say to a post-Holocaust generation of Jews. Second, it borrows extensively from the philosophical style of the non-Jewish world in which it was composed: Saadya from the Islamic Kalam, Ibn Gabirol and Abraham Ibn Ezra from medieval Neo-Platonism, Maimonides from medieval Aristotelianism, Herman Cohen from nineteenth century German Idealism, Franz Rosenzweig and Martin Buber from twentieth century, continental Existentialism and Mordecai Kaplan from American Naturalism. In fact, it seems that its main function in each generation is to provide a reading of Judaism in terms of the philosophical vocabulary of the period in which it was written. Third, it is a remarkably pluralistic enterprise. Take any issue, even one as central as the nature of God. Apart from the fact that He exists, there is little that one can find in common on it in the thought of Maimonides, Isaac Luria, Martin Buber, Mordecai Kaplan and Abraham Heschel. Finally, and most significantly, the pre-eminent works in Jewish philosophy were written in a language other than Hebrew: Philo in Greek, Saadya, Halevi, Ibn Gabirol and Maimonides in Arabic, Herman Cohen, Franz Rosenzweig and Martin Buber in German, Mordecai Kaplan and Abraham Heschel in English. Each of these thinkers was eminently capable of writing in masterful Hebrew; in fact, many of them composed other lasting works in Hebrew — for example Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*, Halevi's liturgical and secular poetry, or Heschel's scholarly work on Rabbinic theology. But they chose to write their philosophical works in the language of some other civilization in which they were obviously also at home.

This configuration literally begs for an explanation and our first clue may well lie in this passage from Maimonides' own Introduction to his *Guide*. Why is he writing this book? He answers:

... its purpose is to give indications to a religious man for whom the validity of our Law has become established in his soul and has become actual in his belief — such a man being perfect in his religion and character, and having

studied the sciences of the philosophers and come to know what they signify. The human intellect having drawn him on and led him to dwell within its province, he must have felt distressed by the externals of the Law and by the meanings of the above-mentioned equivocal, derivative, or amphibolous terms, as he continued to understand them by himself or was made to understand them by others. Hence he would remain in a state of perplexity and confusion as to whether he should follow his intellect, renounce what he knew concerning the terms in question, and consequently consider that he has renounced the foundations of the Law. Or he should hold fast to his understanding of these terms and not let himself be drawn on together with his intellect, rather turning his back on it and moving away from it, while at the same time perceiving that he had brought loss to himself and harm to his religion. He would be left with those imaginary beliefs to which he owed his fear and difficulty and would not cease to suffer from heartache and great perplexity.³

To whom, then, is this volume addressed? To the Jew for whom identification with Judaism and its teachings can no longer be taken for granted, to the Jew who is painfully aware of other ideological options, who is both Jewish and yet thoroughly at home in the intellectual currents of the non-Jewish world at large and in a language other than Hebrew. In short, it is addressed to the intellectually "marginal" Jew. We use "marginal" here specifically to designate the Jew who stands "on the margin" that separates Judaism and some other civilization, and not in the contemporary sense of the Jew whose Jewish identity is remote and fragile. Maimonides was certainly not "marginal" in this latter sense; he was, however, in the former sense. If we may generalize from Maimonides, Jewish philosophy flowers when Judaism itself becomes problematic, when it can no longer compel allegiance through its own internal dynamics, when it is no longer self-validating. And, we may assume, the one who feels the marginality of his condition most acutely is the philosopher himself. That is precisely what impels him to write. He may permit his concerned contemporaries to look over his shoulder but he writes primarily for himself, to resolve his own personal perplexity about where he stands in the face of the challenges of his day. The legitimate task of Jewish philosophy, then, is "apologetics" in the best sense of the term: to provide a coherent, internally consistent and sophisticated defense of Judaism in terms of the conceptual scheme and vocabulary of the particular age; in short, to make the case for Judaism, precisely at a time when such a case has to be made. And since the nature of the challenge from the outside world is constantly changing, both the substance and the vocabulary in which Jewish philosophy is articulated must change concurrently. Hence the ephemeral nature of all such formulations. Hence also, the decision to write in the *lingua franca* of the day instead of Hebrew. It could not be assumed that

3. *The Guide of the Perplexed*, Translated with an Introduction and Notes by Shlomo Pines (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1963). pp. 5-6.

the intended audience would have mastered Hebrew — further evidence of its “marginality.”

If this analysis has merit, we may be able to explain why Jewish philosophy flowered in those historical periods when Jews participated in an intellectually open society. The Islamic and Christian world between the tenth and fifteenth centuries provided the paradigmatic instance of such a setting. Jews got into philosophy in the Middle Ages because both Christian and Islamic conditions of the age encouraged them to share this experience. The very presence of three competing religious traditions, each claiming exclusive truth, impelled believers of all traditions to step back and reflect on the phenomenon of religion itself. Not only had Judaism, Christianity and Islam become problematic to each community of believers, religion itself had become problematic. It is not surprising, then, that the first in the line of great medieval Jewish philosophers, the tenth century Saadya Gaon, does insist that, contrary to our opening claim, in his age it is very much a *mizvah* to do philosophy. Saadya's contemporaries, indeed, faced a bewildering number of alternative religious options. First, there were Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Each of these was further split into a traditionalist camp which insisted on a literal understanding of scripture and a modernist camp which was prepared to modify its teachings to accommodate the new philosophical winds. In fact, Greek science and philosophy had been rediscovered and had produced a crop of skeptics who denied, in principle, the validity of all forms of revelation. Oriental cults abounded and the Jewish community was also confronted by a vigorous and articulate sectarian group, the Karaites, who challenged the authority not only of the Talmud but, also, of its acknowledged interpreters who sat at the head of the Babylonian academies, the most prominent of whom was Saadya himself.

Is it any wonder, then, that Saadya and his contemporaries were impelled into philosophy? Judaism had, indeed, become problematic and, Saadya insists, Jews must resort to philosophy for two reasons: first, in order that reason may establish and verify those religious claims which have been given by revelation alone; and second, in order to answer the attacks on Judaism on the part of competing ideologies.⁴ In short, Jews must do philosophy because they can no longer function intuitively as Jews.

It is clear that our situation in twentieth century America is very much a replica of Saadya's age. We, too, live in a veritable supermarket of ideologies, each clamoring for adherents. American Jewry is intellectually sophisticated and upwardly mobile. Jewish identity is entirely voluntary and much of contemporary culture argues against any form of reli-

4. Saadia Gaon, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, translated by Samuel Rosenblatt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), Introductory Treatise, pp. 3-37. See, in particular, pp. 26-33, where Saadia defends his rational approach as mandatory in his day.

gious identification as anachronistic, and against the preservation of ethnic ties as destructive of a more broadly-based “love of humanity.” Assimilation and intermarriage are rife. America, too, then, is the paradigmatic open society and we are all paradigmatic marginal Jews. We are all painfully aware of other ideological options. In such a cultural context, it is again a *mizvah* that reflective and articulate Jews once again step back and look afresh at what it means to be a Jew in terms of the conceptual scheme and vocabulary of our own day and, in the process, address the specific challenges to Jewish identity that are being posed by the competing ideologies of our generation.

There is one additional factor that should impel a flowering of Jewish philosophy in our day. Our generation has experienced two momentous historical events: the European Holocaust and the creation of the State of Israel. In the past, events of such magnitude have always sparked an outpouring of philosophical creativity as thinking Jews struggled to integrate their new historical experience into their thought patterns as Jews. Two notable examples come to mind: the destruction of the Temple in 586 BCE and the expulsion of the Jewish community from Spain in 1492. Each of these events forced the participant and succeeding generations to rethink the ground rules of Jewish existence. Jeremiah 29 — though it pre-dates, by a few years, the destruction of the first Temple — is a letter addressed to Jews already in exile and it represents an attempt to formulate how they are to live, to think and to worship as Jews in exile and without a Temple. This letter is an explicit contradiction of Deuteronomy 28:36-45, which warns that the exilic experience will be totally destructive of all attempts to live fruitfully and to worship as Jews. Jeremiah disagrees and orders the exilic community to do just that. In other words, the reality of the event, when it finally occurred, exposed the inadequacies of the earlier ideology and impelled the creation of a totally new one.

Similarly, the expulsion from Spain forced the Jewish community to struggle anew with the twin themes of exile and redemption. A few generations later this struggle led to the mystically inspired theology of Isaac Luria, which sees exile not only as a historical event in the life of the Jewish people, but also as a metaphysical symbol denoting a fault in all of creation, affecting even God Himself who is portrayed as sharing in Israel's exile. The work of redemption is now assigned to the individual Jew whose every action becomes potentially redemptive — not only of Israel, but also of the world, and even of God Himself. Momentous historical events, precisely because they are unprecedented, expose the inadequacies and anachronisms of our ideological consolidations and force us to struggle to reformulate them so that we may respond to our own historical experience as Jews.

The role of Jewish philosophy may also be set forth in traditional terms, by suggesting that it be understood as *midrash*. *Midrash* is com-

monly understood to designate a brief homily, usually of Talmudic origin and designed to teach some truth which a contemporary homiletician will then expound and elaborate into a sermon. But this is an excessively narrow sense of the term. In its broad sense, *midrash* denotes a process — the process of exegesis and interpretation by which the meaning of an ancient text is expounded beyond its original plain or literal sense (*p'shat* or “simple” meaning) to convey ever-new layers of meaning. Sometimes the text is a specific scriptural word or verse. A legal passage, through halakhic or legal *midrash* may yield an entire body of laws; a narrative passage, through aggadic or homiletical *midrash*, may yield a homily bearing on some moral, theological, spiritual or national issue facing the community.

It is not too much of an extrapolation, however, to expand this view by suggesting that a philosophy of Judaism in its entirety may be understood as a *midrash* where the “text” becomes the total body of prior traditional teaching. Thus, Rabbinic Judaism as a whole may be understood as a *midrash* (or, more accurately, a series of overlapping *midrashim*) on Scripture, as can Maimonides’ *Guide*, the Zohar, Lurianic *Kabbalah*, Mordecai Kaplan’s *Judaism as a Civilization* or Heschel’s *God in Search of Man*. In these latter instances, the “text” is Scripture plus Rabbinic literature (which, because of its scope and centrality is awarded a role just about equal to that of Scripture) along with selected later formulations of Judaism. Heschel, for example, draws heavily from the Talmud, from medieval philosophy, from mysticism and from Hasidism; all of these together form his “text.” Jewish intellectual history, then, can be understood as an evolving and overlapping set of *midrashim* on an ever-expanding “text,” itself a *midrash*.

A *midrash* is a temporary consolidation. It represents an ideological plateau, the outcome of an extended struggle to rethink and rewrite an ideology that has been recognized as out of date. Every *midrash* exists in a state of tension. On the one hand, it is rooted in the past, on a “text”, understood either narrowly as Scripture, or broadly as a previous *midrash*; on the other hand, every *midrash* is directed to a new historical situation, one that is by definition unprecedented — for otherwise why would we need a new *midrash*? An effective *midrash*, then, is inherently unsatisfactory; it tends to be offensive to the traditionalist (who doesn’t feel the need for a new formulation in the first place) and inadequate to the liberal (who is prepared to distance himself more radically from the “text”). Furthermore, since the Jewish people is very much within history, all of these consolidations are inherently ephemeral and quickly outdated. They may well linger long after they have served their immediate purpose; it is always safer to hold on to the past and the task of evolving a new consolidation is an enormously difficult and painful adventure — until we are shocked out of our complacency by the realization that our children consider us anachronistic.

What difference does it make if we refer to our philosophical consoli-

dations as *midrash*? Pre-eminently, it enables us to recognize them as decisively influenced by the historical and cultural contexts in which they arise. They are all cultural documents, shot through with human appropriation, testimonies as much to the concerns and vocabulary of the specific age as to the eternal, ongoing “truths” of Judaism. We are thus liberated to do in a much more conscious and deliberate way what Jews have been doing all along. We can recognize not only the legitimacy but even the imperative to do *midrash*.

But then another, more significant question presses itself upon us. What are the theological implications of this understanding of *midrash*? Specifically, what are the implications for a theology of revelation? Our claim is that in each generation Jews felt free to reformulate the intellectual context of their tradition in terms of the conceptual scheme and idiom of their time. What gave them the authority to do this? And what authority did they accord to the original formulation of the content of Jewish belief in the Torah? If all formulations of Jewish thought are as much the product of human appropriations as they are of divine revelation, should we then not do away with the notion that there is an “ideal” (in the Platonic sense) Judaism — an original, pristine formulation of Torah which embodies the very words of God Himself, floats above the historical experience of the Jewish people, out of which all further formulations emerge through the simple unfolding of the implications of the original, ultimate truth? The ultimate theological implication of this view is that even the original revelation itself must also be seen as the product of divine and human interaction, as both God’s *mattan Torah* and man’s *kabbalat Torah*. Abraham Heschel captures this interaction when he insists: “As a report about revelation, the Bible itself is a *midrash*.”⁵ All further formulations of Jewish thought, then, are *midrashim* on an original text which is itself *midrash*.

The issue of revelation is crucial because our understanding of revelation determines the authority of Torah on matters of belief and practice. And, on the issue of revelation, there are only two possibilities: either Torah is the literal word of God (the dogma of verbal revelation) or it is not. If it is not, we then recognize a substantive human contribution to the formulation of Torah and thereby construe its authority in an entirely different light. *Midrash*, as we have described it, becomes a continuation of a process that was present from the very outset. Torah itself, then, is properly *midrash*.

It is no accident that among contemporary Jewish theologians it was Heschel who hit upon this formulation. He was a theological supernaturalist but he also inherited from his hasidic ancestors a conviction that God is beyond human conceptualization. After all, what kind of God

5. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1956), pp. 185ff and 260ff.

would He be if *I* can understand *Him*? Heschel was forced to confront the intrinsic inadequacy of all human characterizations of God. The naive literalist understanding of revelation was unacceptable not because it demeans human beings (as a Mordecai Kaplan might claim) but because it demeans God! Torah, then, could not be the literal word of God. It was a human appropriation of some more primitive content which, in its purity, is inaccessible to us. Heschel's monumental *Torah Min Hashamayim B'asplaryah Shel Hadorot*⁶ is a wide ranging documentation that this view of revelation permeates the literature of Talmudic Judaism as well.

A more contemporary formulation of this claim would be that all theological statements, particularly those that refer to God, His qualities and His manifold relationships with His creation have to be understood as myths.⁷ In a preliminary way, to say that all theological claims are myths is to say that they must not be taken as literal, precise renderings of the realities to which they refer. Popular usage to the contrary, however, neither are they to be understood as deliberate fictions. Myths use material from everyday experience, from the realm of time and space, to enable us to talk about that which is totally beyond direct human apprehension. They are partial, impressionistic constructs or accommodations and they are indispensable, for human conceptualization and language are totally incapable of capturing the reality which we call God in His very essence. The issue is not myth or no myth, but, rather, which myth. If God is to figure in our scriptures, theologies, liturgies and rituals, if He is to participate in the life of the community of believers, His essence has to be concretized in the form of myth. The Torah itself, then, has to be understood as the original complex myth through which our ancestors interpreted their historical experience.

A myth, like a *midrash*, has a life-span of its own. It lives and it dies; that is, it loses its power to do what great myths uniquely can do: create a community, establish identity, generate emotion, reveal unsuspected truths about the world and the human experience and motivate to action. But rarely does a myth in its entirety die, for then the community will also die. More frequently, portions of the myth die for segments of the community. When this happens, a vital and healthy community will then set about to revise or rewrite its myth. That is precisely what happened when Job's personal experience led him to conclude that the received tradition which stipulated that human suffering must be understood as God's punishment, was simply inadequate. In effect, that portion of the biblical myth died for Job and the voice out of the whirlwind should be understood as proclaiming a new — equally mythical — understanding of God's

6. London and New York: The Soncino Press, vol. 1, 1962; vol. 2, 1965.

7. The seminal statement suggesting that the language of religion should be understood as myth is Paul Tillich's *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957). See also an imaginative extension of Tillich's argument in John Herman Randall Jr.'s *The Role of Knowledge in Western Religion* (Boston: Starr King Press, 1968), pp. 103-134.

complex relationship with His creation. Harold Kushner's *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* is a contemporary paradigm of the same process, as is the enterprise of Holocaust theology. In the latter instance, the process is still in a preliminary, fragmentary stage, witness the fact that we have neither a liturgy nor a set of rituals which are Holocaust-specific. Great myths always have the power to generate liturgy and ritual; Passover is the primary example of that process.

It should be apparent from the above that much of what can be said about *midrash* applies equally well to religious myths. They are two ways of describing the same process. Most important for our purposes here, a myth — like a *midrash* — comes into being out of the encounter between a community and its distinctive historical experience. Both are the way in which that community reads its historical experience. That reading is then embodied in the community's scriptures, liturgies and rituals which, in turn, function to train future generations to read *their* historical experience through the prism of the community's distinctive myth. Scripture, then, is the first stage in a process of myth writing and rewriting which extends throughout the historical experience of the community.

By definition, then, it is precisely the "marginal" member of the community, as we have defined the condition of "marginality," who first feels the incipient death throes of portions of the myth. However crudely or negatively expressed, his dissatisfaction with the received tradition jars the community out of its complacency and alerts it to the need to engage itself once again in the revision of the myth/*midrash*.

Three issues, then, define the Jewish philosopher's role in the process of Jewish self-definition in our day. Two of these are classic; one is unprecedented. An open intellectual setting renders every myth/*midrash* exposed and vulnerable because other options are glaringly accessible. And momentous historical events are uniquely capable of rendering even the most successful of them anachronistic. These dimensions are classical. What is unprecedented, however, is the uniquely modern collapse of the dogma of verbal revelation and, with it, the sense that the Torah can serve as an explicit standard of authority on all matters of belief and practice. Once this happens, we are forced to confront in a new light precisely what claim the received tradition has on our lives. To be precise, what is new here is not the process of *midrash* or remythologizing; our historical survey has shown that this process is familiar and well-established. Rather, what transfigures the enterprise is the uniquely modern self-consciousness, the awareness of the *fact* of history that destroys fundamentalisms of every kind.

For if the Torah itself is a myth or a *midrash*, if there is no such thing as a pristine reading of Judaism which carries within itself its own warranty of ultimate truth, how do we determine which of the later consolidations are authentic? What standard or criterion can we use? And who decides? One who has a question in Jewish law knows how to find an

authoritative answer. What is the ultimate seat of authority in matters of Jewish thought? These interconnected questions will be the topic of a subsequent paper.

The task of revising the Jewish myth/*midrash* in every generation has invariably fallen to Jewish philosophers for it is they who personally and most acutely experience the state of “marginality” and the accompanying dissatisfaction with the received tradition. That is undoubtedly the reason why even the most creative among them has usually been viewed with suspicion by the established authorities of the day — and, in Judaism, the “established authorities” have always been the recognized masters of the halakhic tradition in every generation. This suspicion — and, on occasion, for example, with Maimonides in his day and Mordecai Kaplan and even, to a degree, Abraham Heschel, in our day, “suspicion” is a considerable understatement — can easily be understood.

Ultimately, the philosopher and the halakhist represent two different constituencies. The halakhist speaks for those Jews who are totally at home with their Judaism and its *halakhah*, who either tune out the challenges from the intellectual world outside, or simply do not feel challenged as Jews and, hence, have no need to defend or justify what they stand for. The philosopher, on the other hand, speaks to the Jew whose Judaism is in question, who is not totally at home in the Hebrew language which we must understand as symptomatic of a much deeper sense of not feeling at home with his Judaism. The halakhist can only wonder what the fuss is all about and can only be shocked at the foreign cast which his Judaism acquires as a result of the transformations wrought by the work of the philosopher.

But these tensions notwithstanding, Jewish philosophy is an enormously powerful weapon, doubly powerful because of the flexibility and pluralism on which it thrives. It may well be an elitist enterprise, created by the few for the few; it may easily become dated; it may well strain the implicitly accepted boundaries of authentic Jewish teaching. But, overriding all of these considerations, it serves in every generation to enable countless Jews to remain Jews precisely at a time when the halakhists could not do so on their own.

Today, in our situation, in late twentieth century America, it is once again an enterprise whose hour has come. It can no longer be considered a luxury. The elitist few have now become the many. In fact, the problem is no longer to find Jews who feel the problems, but, rather, to persuade these Jews even to consider the answers that are being suggested by the philosophers of our day. That may be the greatest challenge of all.

The End of the Guide: Maimonides on the Best Life for Man

DANIEL H. FRANK

I. Introduction

IN THIS ESSAY I AM INTERESTED IN TRACING Maimonides' answer to a perennial question in (at least) Western philosophy: What is the best life for man? Aristotle set the problem for succeeding generations of philosophers, but it seems to me that Maimonides' view of the *summum bonum* differs in crucial respects. In order better to see this difference let us first take a look at the Aristotelian view of the human good.

II. Aristotle

In his major work in moral philosophy, the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle seriously considers only two candidates for the *summum bonum*: (1) the life of moral virtue, a life lived squarely within the status-conscious milieu of fourth century Athenian society. The morally virtuous man is one who displays such moral virtues as courage and liberality on all occasions in which they are called for. We would say that such an individual lives a life of "action." (2) Aristotle's second candidate is the theoretical or contemplative life, a life whose characteristic activity lies outside of the moral sphere. Whether Aristotle had in mind a theoretical scientist like Einstein or a mystic like Meister Eckhardt is less important than his insistence that the contemplative life is, by its very nature, amoral,¹ placing no premium upon the performance of good deeds. Indeed, the two lives are incommensurable for Aristotle. For him the contemplative attaches no importance to moral and political activity; and, on the other hand, the morally virtuous man places no importance on theoretical activity. As to

1. *Nicomachean Ethics* (= NE) X.7-8 (1177b26-1178a22) diametrically opposes two sorts of life: the life of moral virtue and the contemplative life. John Cooper (in *Reason and Human Good in Aristotle* [Cambridge, Mass., 1975]) points out that "Aristotle is . . . comparing two distinct modes of life, one which he calls an intellectual life and one which he calls a moral life" (p. 159). But Cooper later suggests (at pp. 165-67) that the moral life is, in fact, a mixed life, some sort of synthesis of the two ("distinct") lives. I do not follow him here. Although there is an intellectual component in the moral life the type of reasoning involved — practical reasoning — is not the same as that involved in the "intellectual" (contemplative) life, theoretical reasoning. And, so, whatever sort of mixture the moral life is, it is not one which includes theoretical reason, the sort which is found in the "intellectual" life. Thus we must conclude that neither of the lives, by virtue of its own nature, partakes in its opposite.

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this last point, I do not mean that the moral life is positively anti-*intellectual*, a sort of ethical nativism. Quite the contrary, the life of moral virtue requires practical *reasoning* for its success. Indeed, Aristotle does *not* believe that we are born good,² but, rather, that we acquire the moral virtues through *intelligent* practice. Yet, it is true for him that *theoretical* reasoning, understood to mean the sort of intellection directed toward invariant and changeless objects, is wholly absent from our moral calculations.³

The point which remains is the rank ordering of these two incommensurable lives. Aristotle is very clear that the theoretical, contemplative life is superior to the moral life.⁴ Though he asserts that our mortality requires a degree of external prosperity (food, clothing, shelter, friendship), human happiness and flourishing is a function of theoretical activity and contemplation.⁵ The more we contemplate and the more we imitate the activity of the gods, the happier and more fulfilled we shall be as human beings. Paradoxically, the best life for *man* is a life akin to the *divine*.⁶

For Aristotle, like Maimonides at a later date, human happiness consists in *imitatio Dei*. But, just as their views as to the nature and characteristic activity of the deity were different, so their respective views as to the human good were different. Aristotle's god was an introverted and narcissistic thinking machine, a being whose sole object of contemplation was itself,⁷ admittedly the highest and most perfect object of knowledge. Thus, for Aristotle, *imitatio Dei* entails a (god-like) conscious removal of oneself from active participation in moral and political affairs. The contemplative will place no premium upon the performance of good deeds, nor will he imagine that true human well-being consists in such activity. Though such "wordly" activity is not proscribed (in fact, the life of moral

2. *NE* II.1 (1103a23-26).

3. *NE* VI.1 (1139a3-14), VI.5 (1140b27-8).

4. *NE* VI.7 (1141a20-22), X.7 (1177a12-18, 1178a5-8), X.8 (1178a9).

5. *NE* X.8 (1178b33-35, 1178b28-32).

6. *NE* X.7 (1177b31-34), X.8 (1178b21-23). Indeed, human happiness is also contrued as a function of that activity which is peculiarly human (*NE* I.7 [1097b24-1098a4;]); but in the final analysis it is that activity which humans *share* with the gods, namely theoretical activity, which prevails.

7. *Metaphysics* XII.9 (1074b33-34). Cf. W.D. Ross (*Aristotle* [London, 1923], p. 183): "For him [Aristotle], that God should know Himself, and that He should know other things, are alternatives [*Meta.* 1074b22], and in affirming the first alternative he implicitly denies the second. Indeed he denies explicitly much that the second would involve; he denies to God all knowledge of evil, and all transition from one object of thought to another [*Meta.* 1074b25, 26, 32]. The result of the wish to exclude from the divine life any relation to evil and any 'shadow of turning' is the impossible and barren ideal of a knowledge with no object but itself."

(*NE* X.8 (1179a24-29) may be thought to express the gods' concern for human affairs, but the tone seems so snide and ironical that I think the passage is intended the other way.)

virtue affords one a “secondary” sort of happiness),⁸ it is not the *summum bonum*.

We may note in passing that, just as Aristotle does not proscribe the doing of moral acts, so he, *unlike* contemplatives of a later date, does *not* commend an ascetic life.⁹ Though human happiness is a function of theoretical/contemplative activity (only),¹⁰ he is not urging the theorizer to take no interest at all in this world and its material comforts. Rather, his point is that one should not be seduced by its attractions. Though mortality requires a modicum of wordly goods, one should not imagine that human well-being consists in a surfeit of them.¹¹ Again, Aristotle commends a life oriented to another sphere altogether.

So much for Aristotle who, in the final analysis, turned his back to the world. Though he spends the greater part of the *Nicomachean Ethics* in a discussion of such social virtues as friendship, courage, temperance, and liberality, he fixes the *summum bonum* for man in a life devoted to *theōria*, an activity quite separate and distinct from the life of moral virtue.

III. Maimonides

Contra Aristotle, Maimonides' conception of the *summum bonum* does not remove man from active participation in moral and political affairs, the world of deeds and actions. But, though the human good entails a life devoted to deeds of justice and righteousness, Maimonides asserts that these deeds must be informed by a deep awareness that they are the sort of actions which the God of righteousness and justice Himself does. The mere “going through the motions,” the doing of actions without an awareness of their divine foundation, is not sufficient.

For both Maimonides and Aristotle the *summum bonum* consists of *imitatio Dei*, but, given their differing theological presuppositions, their respective views of human felicity differ. For Aristotle the gods “will appear ridiculous (*geloioi*)” if they engage in acts of justice.¹² Maimonides could hardly agree. His God is a God of justice and righteousness.¹³ To put it slightly differently: for the Greek, the impersonality of the gods, the fact that their activity was so self-centered and unrelated to the world, meant that imitation of their activity had no connection to the moral sphere. For the Jew, contrarily, the love of God for His people and for all the world, the fact that His actions are for our (ultimate) advantage, meant that imitation of His ways manifested itself in good deeds, deeds informed by awareness of divine love and justice.

8. NE X.8 (1178a9).

9. Maimonides follows Aristotle in this; cf. *Hilkhot De'ot* III.1.

10. NE X.8 (1178b28-32).

11. NE X.8 (1178b33-1179a5).

12. NE X.8 (1178b11).

13. *Jeremiah* 9:23, *Psalms* 89:15.

a. "Guide" III.54

The *locus classicus* for Maimonides' thoughts about the human good is the final chapter of the *Guide of the Perplexed*, III.54. This chapter is one of the most disputed in the entire corpus,¹⁴ because it seems as if the author opts ultimately for the *Aristotelian* contemplative ideal as the *summum bonum*. I do not believe that this is so, but before we reach this conclusion we must carefully explicate the passage at hand.

Maimonides tells us in III.54 that, according to both the philosophers — ancient and modern (Greek and Arab) —¹⁵ and the prophets,¹⁶ there are four species or types of human perfection: (1) material, i.e., as regards possession of material goods such as money, clothes, and land; (2) bodily, i.e., as regards the health and strength of the body; (3) moral, i.e., as regards the moral virtues, and manifesting itself in deeds towards others; and finally (4) rational or theoretical ("true human perfection"),¹⁷ i.e., in the realm of intellection about divine things (as the philosophers put it) or knowledge of God (as the biblical prophets put it).

These four perfections are ranged in a hierarchy, the lowest being material [= (1) above] and the highest being rational [= (4) above]. As regards the last and highest human perfection, Maimonides asserts that it is "the true human perfection" and "the ultimate end"¹⁸ for which sake all else is done. Furthermore, and very reminiscent of Aristotle,¹⁹ the reason why rational perfection is better than moral perfection is that "[t]his ultimate perfection pertains to you alone [sc. unlike the moral virtues which "are concerned with what occurs between a human individual and someone else"], no one else being associated in it with you in any way."²⁰ The self-sufficiency of the contemplative is an argument in favor of its claim to be the highest human good. According to Maimonides, speaking on behalf of both the philosophers and the biblical prophets, man reaches his highest stage by perfecting his rational faculties and, in so doing, he apparently needs to take no account of the rest of humanity.²¹

Now, at first (and perhaps even second) glance, Maimonides' position as to the nature and relative importance of the moral life and the contemplative life seems very similar to Aristotle's. The life of moral virtue, which depends upon a social context for its realization, takes second place

14. For some of the dispute see section IIIId.

15. The "philosophical" discussion of the four perfections is to be found in the *Guide* (tr. S. Pines [Chicago, 1963], on pp. 634-36. (All subsequent citations to, and translations from, the *Guide* are to the Pines edition.)

16. For the "prophetic" discussion see *Guide*, pp. 636-38.

17. *Guide*, p. 635.

18. *Ibid*.

19. *NE* X.7 (1177a27-b1).

20. *Guide*, p. 635.

21. Cf. *Guide* III.27: "It is clear that to this ultimate perfection [rational perfection] there do not belong either actions or moral qualities and that it consists only of opinions toward which speculation has led and that investigation has rendered compulsory" (p. 511).

to the contemplative life. (In fact, it seems as if Maimonides even outdoes Aristotle in one regard. For the Greek, the moral life is an end in itself²² ["virtue is its own reward"], though, indeed, it is a less good life for man. For Maimonides, however, the moral life has only instrumental value and is not an end in itself. Maimonides states explicitly that "this species of perfection [moral perfection] is a preparation for something else and not an end in itself."²³ So, it seems as though Maimonides accords the moral life no intrinsic value whatsoever.)

I do not think that one can argue away the apparent similarity between the Aristotelian and the Maimonidean views. In fact, I would go so far as to assert that Maimonides' life of moral perfection, the sort of life which takes the second prize, is precisely Aristotle's life of moral virtue, also the sort of life which takes the second prize to the contemplative life.²⁴ I think, however, that Maimonides and Aristotle differ radically, appearances notwithstanding, in their respective conceptions of the theoretical life, the *summum bonum*.

b. "Guide" I.54

Before we proceed with a discussion of III.54, we turn to a cognate chapter of the *Guide*, I.54, which is important because of the light that it sheds on the prophetic notion of "knowledge of God," which, it will be recalled, encapsulates the fourth and highest perfection for man.

When Moses went up to Sinai he did so for a reason, namely, to know God so as to transform the masses below into a holy people.²⁵ He made two requests of God: to know His essence and to know His attributes. But even the greatest prophet could not apprehend the divine essence.²⁶ Some detour had to be found. That was via God's revelation to Moses of His attributes. What then, are those attributes, those "qualities" by which one can know God? Since His essence is uniform, there is no positive (non-essential) attribute which can be superadded to it; thus, one can only know God by virtue of something extraneous to His being, namely His *actions*. As Maimonides asserts: "Accordingly the apprehension of these actions [divine actions] is an apprehension of His attributes."²⁷ Moses' desire to know God, so that he could, in turn, legislate to his people on a

22. NE VI.5 (1140b6-7), X.6 (1176b8-9). Cf. also NE II.4 (1105a28-33).

23. *Guide*, pp. 635, 636.

24. If the life of moral virtue, the penultimate human perfection, is to be equated with the life which the wise (*not* pious) man leads in *Hilkhot De'ot* (I.4-5), a life lived by one "whose character traits [and subsequent actions] all lie in a mean," then the connection between Maimonides and Aristotle is extremely close.

25. This is how Maimonides understands *Exodus* 33:13: "That I may know Thee, to the end that I may find grace in Thy sight and consider that this nation is Thy people." See *Guide* I.54, p. 125.

26. This is Maimonides' understanding of *Exodus* 33:20: "Thou canst not see My face." See *Guide*, p. 124.

27. *Guide*, p. 124.

divine foundation, is met by his being shown how God rules the world. Only through witnessing God's *deeds* and *actions* could Moses, a human, come to know God's nature. And, thus, he came to know not a static, self-centered deity, but an active God who is concerned with, and takes an active part in, the human realm. To imitate His ways was to *perform* (not contemplate) divine deeds, or, if you will, to legislate on the basis of a divine encounter.²⁸

The relevance of this passage for our purposes is clear. The highest perfection for man is to know God. To know God necessitates that one

become like unto Him . . . as far as [one] is able; which means that we should make our actions like unto His, as the Sages made clear when interpreting the verse, "Ye shall be holy."²⁹ They said: "He is gracious, so be you also gracious; He is merciful, so be you also merciful."³⁰

Man's highest good is knowledge of God, and this knowledge entails *action*. It is not the sort of knowledge which is unconnected with the moral sphere, because one learns that God is a God who performs good *deeds*, a God who influences the history of the world.

Though, at first glance, Maimonides' highest (of four) perfection seems perilously close to the contemplative, amoral ideal enunciated by Aristotle, a careful reading of I.54 shows that Maimonides' ideal is not the contemplative unconcerned with the society in which he lives, but, rather, the legislative prophet, Moses, whose imitation of God necessitated political action. On the Greek side we may note that Plato's philosopher-king is perhaps the closest analogue to Moses. But the analogy breaks down quickly. Plato's philosopher who ascends from the "cave" into the light (of knowledge) is dazzled by what he sees, so much so that he must be "compelled" (*Republic* 520a8) to return to the "cave" to help humanity.³¹ Indeed, the Platonic philosopher would rather contemplate apart from the crowd than legislate to it, a most un-Maimonidean choice.

28. See Lawrence V. Berman, "The Political Interpretation of the Maxim: The Purpose of Philosophy is the Imitation of God," *Studia Islamica*, XV (1961): 53-61.

29. *Leviticus* 19:2.

30. *Siphre to Deuteronomy* 10:12. Both the *Leviticus* passage (referred to in note 29) and this present passage are quoted at the end of *Guide* I.54 (p. 128).

31 Pines' remarks on this are much to the point: "[Maimonides] propounded a perhaps at least partly original theoretical legitimation for the activity of the legislator and the statesman by regarding it as a kind of imitation of God. (In this he possibly went beyond the Plato of the *Republic*, who required the philosopher to return to the "cave," but did not attempt to mitigate the regret that they [*sic*] must feel at being torn from the pure contemplation of the eternal truths and obliged to govern the polis)" (Pines, *Guide*, p. cxxi). Cf. also A.W.H. Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility: A Study in Greek Values* (London, 1960), p. 347: ". . . but it must be emphasized that Aristotle has succeeded no better than Plato in demonstrating why a man capable of philosophizing should at any moment choose rather to perform any individual moral or political action."

c. "Guide" III.54 again

We now return to the end of the *Guide*, III.54. At the point where we left the discussion of this chapter, one might have thought that Maimonides had come close to recommending the Aristotelian view of the *summum bonum*. For Maimonides the ultimate human perfection is perfection of man's rational faculties, which would lead man to "true opinions concerning the divine things", i.e., knowledge of God. Indeed, the self-sufficiency of a life devoted to theoretical activity was an argument in favor of the priority of such a life over the moral life. And, so, Maimonides *seems* to be advocating a life disconnected from the moral sphere.

One problem with this view must be noted straightway. If the "amoral" reading is correct, then we have an *internal* contradiction within the *Guide* itself, namely between I.54, discussed above, and III.54. Simply put, in I.54 knowledge of God, the knowledge which Moses gained on Sinai, was not knowledge of the sort which negated the prophet's concern for humanity. Quite the contrary, that knowledge of God was knowledge of His *moral* deeds and impelled Moses to his legislative activity. Moses achieved the highest perfection possible for man, knowledge of God (or "true opinions concerning the divine things"). My claim is that this knowledge, though not practical/moral knowledge, has practical/moral ramifications. Knowledge of God entails the *performance* of divine-like deeds. I am in agreement with Altmann who says:

Maimonides obviously distinguishes between the moral virtues . . . on the one hand and the imitation of the Divine attributes, which, unlike the moral virtues, is not the result of practical reasoning, but follows from theoretical, metaphysical considerations. *Imitatio Dei* is, therefore, but the practical consequence of the intellectual love of God and is part and parcel of the ultimate perfection.³²

Indeed, the "pre-theoretic" moral life, the doing of good deeds without an awareness of their divine foundation, is not the ultimate perfection for man. But this is *not* to say that the *summum bonum* for man has no moral ramifications.³³ Contemplation of God, knowledge of Him, "affects practice."³⁴ Again, the paradigm is Moses, the *legislative* prophet.

It remains for us to try to make III.54 consonant with I.54. If we can do so (and I think we can), then we will both acquit Maimonides of the charge of contradicting himself within the *Guide* and sustain our earlier

32 Alexander Altmann, "Maimonides's 'Four Perfections'," in *Essays in Jewish Intellectual History* (Hanover, New Hampshire, 1981), p. 73.

33 I would connect "pre"- and "post-theoretic" morality with, respectively, the morality of the wise man and the morality of the pious man, the *hasid* (cf. *Hilkhot De'ot* 1.4-5). The morality of the *hasid* is informed by awareness of God and is done out of love for Him and His ways. For much further elaboration of this point see S. Schwarzschild, "Moral Radicalism and 'Middlingness' in the Ethics of Maimonides," *Studies in Medieval Culture*, XI (1977): 65-94.

34 David Hartman, *Maimonides: Torah and Philosophic Quest* (Philadelphia, 1976), p. 205.

claim that Maimonides and Aristotle differ on the *summum bonum* for man.

After his (philosophical) discussion of the four perfections, Maimonides turns to a non-philosophical, i.e., prophetic, explication of the view just presented:

The prophets too have explained to us and interpreted to us the self-same notions [the four perfections] — just as the philosophers have interpreted them — clearly stating to us that neither the perfection of possession nor the perfection of health nor the perfection of moral habits is a perfection of which one should be proud or that one should desire; the perfection of which one should be proud or that one should desire is knowledge of Him, may He be exalted, which is the true science.³⁵

Indeed, here, from a theological point of view, man's highest perfection is asserted to be knowledge of God, which is for the prophet what cognition of intelligibles is for the philosopher. Both prophet and philosopher are in agreement that man's highest good has nothing to do with the perfection of the moral virtues, a perfection which is merely propaedeutic to rational perfection.

So, for the moment, and if the *Guide* were to end at this point, we might have to settle for the internal contradiction that has been noted. However, in the ensuing passages of the chapter Maimonides further elucidates the *summum bonum*, and in so doing he dispels any thoughts that, after all, the amoral contemplative life is the best one for man.

He begins his elucidation of the highest perfection for man, knowledge of God, by quoting *Jeremiah* (9:22-23):

Thus saith the Lord: Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me.

Now this passage seems hardly a proof-text for the view that man's ultimate perfection is *rational* perfection. After all, we are told that the wise man should not glory in his *wisdom*. Indeed, Maimonides is aware of this crux and glosses the phrase "the wise man . . . in his wisdom" as "he who possesses the moral virtues."³⁶ Understood thus, the biblical passage falls into line with the philosophical and prophetic views about man's highest good. In three things man is told *not* to glory: (1) the moral virtues, (2) bodily power, and (3) wealth. The good for man lies in none of these, but in: (4) understanding and knowledge of God.

By bringing the passage from *Jeremiah* into line with his hierarchy of

³⁵ *Guide*, p. 636.

³⁶ The justification for this reading of the biblical passage comes from the beginning of III.54 where one of the four senses of "wisdom" (*hokhmah*) is "acquiring moral virtues" (p. 632), and one of the four senses of "wise" is applicable to "one possessing the moral virtues" (p. 633). Cf. also notes 24 and 33 *supra*, where I present some further (Maimonidean) justification for the view that the *wise* man (the *hakham*) is a man who has perfected the moral virtues, but has no inkling of the divine foundation of the virtues that he practices.

perfections, Maimonides *seems* to give added weight to the contemplative ideal. Knowledge of God is clearly held to be the ultimate perfection of man. Further, this sort of life is diametrically opposed to the life of moral virtue and political action; the latter is a mere propaedeutic to the former. But though the passage from *Jeremiah* praises a life other than the one of moral virtue as being the best for man, Maimonides, in the penultimate paragraph of the *Guide*, goes out of his way to point out that the conclusion of the quoted biblical passage, the injunction to know God, entails knowledge of His *actional* attributes. According to Maimonides, knowledge of God is to be understood by reference to the remainder of the passage from *Jeremiah* 9:23: "That I am the Lord who exercises loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth." Thus, knowing God is knowing a God who performs deeds of loving-kindness, etc. And since (as the verse in *Jeremiah* continues) "in these things [deeds of loving-kindness, etc.] I delight, saith the Lord," Maimonides interprets the whole verse as meaning that it is God's intention

that there should come from [man] loving-kindness, righteousness, and judgment in the earth in the way we have explained³⁷ with regard to the thirteen attributes [or moral qualities]: namely, that the purpose should be assimilation to them [the thirteen attributes] and that this should be our way of life.

With this backward reference to I.54 ("in the way we have explained") we have come full circle. Our goal, it will be remembered, was to make III.54 consonant with I.54 (and in so doing to acquit Maimonides of the charge of self-contradiction). Indeed, what better way could be found than in noting Maimonides' explicit reference in III.54 to the earlier book, and precisely to that point in I.54 where knowledge of God is knowledge of His actional attributes, and *imitatio Dei* is imitation of His ways?³⁸ In I.54 we noted that Moses' desire to know God was met by his being shown God's actional attributes, the kinds of deeds that He performed. Knowledge of God, the highest perfection of man, is knowledge of a God who acts in history; and *imitatio Dei* is the performance of divine-like deeds in the world. And, thus, Moses came down from Sinai and legislated to the Hebrews. Similarly, in III.54, the ultimate perfection of man is found to be knowledge of God and assimilation to His ways, actions of loving-kindness, etc. We cannot sustain the view that the ultimate perfection for man lies in a life which places no premium upon the performance of good deeds.

A word of caution is necessary at this point. In urging that man's highest good, according to Maimonides, entails the doing of deeds of loving-kindness, etc. I am not equating man's highest good with (what Maimonides takes to be) man's *penultimate* good, the life of moral virtue. The deeds which the man of moral virtue performs are not informed by

37 "[I]n the way we have explained" is a reference back to I.54; cf. Pines' note 38, p. 637.

38 *Guide*, pp. 124-25.

knowledge of God. This “pre-theoretic” moral life, the doing of good deeds without awareness of their divine foundation, is not the ultimate perfection of man. But we must *not* suppose that, since the *summum bonum* is not to be equated with the life of moral virtue, man’s highest good according to Maimonides stands opposed to *any* sort of morality. Indeed, Maimonides differs from Aristotle on just this point. Rather, for Maimonides, man’s highest good is knowledge of God *and* (subsequent) action in the moral sphere. Again, *this* good differs from the *penultimate* good in being divinely inspired, *not* in being amoral. As Hartman says: “By distinguishing between morality before and after knowledge of God, Maimonides is expressing a key theme of his philosophy: theoretical knowledge of God affects practice.”³⁹ Knowledge of God expresses itself in love for man. In this regard let us not forget Moses, the legislative prophet and Maimonides’ ideal. Moses himself and prophecy in general (“the highest degree of man and the ultimate term of perfection that can arise for his species”)⁴⁰ stand as a refutation of the Aristotelian “intellectualist” (amoral) view of the *summum bonum*. This is a crucial point. Moses is the *Law-giver*. The giving of the Law *is* his prophetic mission. Indeed, he saw (or, better, heard) God, but his experience of the divine did not end at this point. Moses’ plea to God to “Show me Thy ways” (*Exodus* 33:13) was made from a desire to learn and imitate His ways. And, just as he received the Law from God, so he gave/legislated it to the Hebrews. Mosaic Law, given once and never to be given again, is no more human law than the best life for man is a life devoted to the doing of good deeds without an awareness of their divine import. Rather, Mosaic Law is a *divine* law for humans⁴¹ in just the same way that the best life for man, according to Maimonides, is a life devoted to knowledge of God and divinely-inspired acts toward man.

d. *Two Other Views of the “Summum Bonum”*

Given this position, we must steer a middle course between two opposing views of Maimonides’ position: on the one hand, Shlomo Pines writes:

[The view that] Maimonides at the end adopted the quasi-Kantian idea that the ordinary moral virtues and moral actions are of greater importance and value than the intellectual virtues and the theoretical way of life . . . is completely false.⁴²

Opposing this view, Steven Schwarzschild writes:

Maimonides’ exegesis is clear: man’s purpose is to “know” God, but the God who is to be known is knowable only insofar as He practices grace, justice,

39 Hartman, *Op. cit.*, p. 205.

40 *Guide* II.36, p. 369.

41 *Guide* II.40, pp. 383-84.

42 Pines, *Guide*, p. cxxii.

and righteousness in the world, and to know Him is synonymous with imitating these practices of His in the world [my emphasis].⁴³

Pines' view is correct only if we understand his dismissal of "the ordinary moral virtues and moral actions" as a dismissal of the sorts of action and type of life which constitute the *penultimate* human perfection, the life of moral virtue. But it is incorrect if Pines means for us to think that there is *no* moral component in the ultimate perfection.⁴⁴ There is, and I have shown how it differs from "the ordinary moral virtues." On the other hand, Schwarzschild's view, that knowledge of God is "synonymous" with imitating divine actions, is too strong as it stands. It is better to say with Altmann: "*Imitatio Dei* is, therefore, but the practical *consequence* of the intellectual love of God and is part and parcel of the ultimate perfection" [my emphasis].⁴⁵ The *summum bonum* for man is not, *pace* Schwarzschild, *only* practical, though it does have (divinely-inspired) moral activity as a part. To know God is a theoretical, not a practical, activity, though, to be sure, what one learns is that God is an *actor*, a doer. Imitation of His ways is the (practical) *consequence* of what one has learned. Indeed, as Altmann urges, it is (only) part of the *summum bonum*, though the litmus test of the (purported) divine encounter.

IV. Conclusion

What, then, is the best life for man according to Maimonides? We conclude with his words from the end of the *Guide*:

It is clear that the perfection of man that may truly be glorified in is the one acquired by him who has achieved, in a measure corresponding to his capacity, apprehension of Him, may He be exalted, and who knows His providence extending over His creatures as manifested in the act of bringing them into being and in their governance as it is. The way of life of such an individual, after he has achieved this apprehension, will always have in view loving-kindness, righteousness, and judgment, through assimilation to His actions. . . .⁴⁶

Moses, the legislative prophet, came closest to this ideal. But while there was only one Moses (or perhaps two?) Maimonides' message to *all* of us seems clear.

43 Schwarzschild, *Op. cit.*, p. 70.

44 Cf. Isadore Twersky, *Introduction to the Code of Maimonides ("Mishneh Torah")* (New Haven, 1980), p. 511, note 390.

45 Altmann, *Op. cit.*, p. 73.

46 *Guide*, p. 638.

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The Book of the Honeycomb's Flow (Sēpher Nōpheth Šūphīm). By JUDAH MESSER LEON. Edited and translated by Isaac Rabinowitz. Ithaca and London. Cornell University Press, 1983. lxx + 603 pp.

Reviewed by MICHAEL FISHBANE

"do you happen to know anything about Judith yourself, except that she cut off Holofernes' head; and has been made the highlight of about a million vile pictures ever since, in which the painters thought they could surely attract the public to the double show of an execution, and a pretty woman, especially with the added pleasure of hinting at previously ignoble sin?" — asked John Ruskin, over a century ago, in his *Mornings in Florence*. And, I dare say, if his Christian readers knew so little then, they were still enviously informed in comparison with Christian readers today, though the apocryphal Book of Judith is included in their canon, and particularly so in comparison with Jewish readers, for whom the text is uncanonical and not part of Scriptural study.

In all, the Book of Judith is a short composition of sixteen chapters which tell the edifying tale of a Jewess who was not intimidated, as were the High Priest Joakim and the male assemblage, by the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar's general Holofernes. Trusting in God, this woman of exemplary piety and faith won the confidence and aroused the desire of the enemy commander and beheaded him through steely guile and co-

quetry. The result was victory for the Jews and salvation for the holy city.

It is generally agreed that this ancient story is a fictive and embellished epic narrative of great antiquity, but scholars are divided as to its date and whether the literary *topos* has a historical kernel. Some moderns did find such a kernel in the 4th cent. B.C.E., but they see the composition as having been written in the days of the Hasmoneans in order to inspire their confidence and spiritual resistance (comparable to the role of the opening chapters of Daniel).

The writer of the present book under review does not deal with these historical, historical-literary, and functional questions, preferring to give particular attention to the literary "artistry" of the book. It may be noted that, in recent years, a small group of scholarly studies have tried to do just that, with mixed and often unclear results. This, presumably, accounts for Ms. Craven's decision to take up the problem once again in this recently published dissertation (from Vanderbilt University), and to limit herself to a description of the "objective" sequences of the book and their purported symmetries.

I must say that, in my view, the results are hardly satisfactory or, when they are, not very stimulating. For although Craven does review various achievements in recent literary studies of biblical books, and shows a strong preference for Muilenberg's version of rhetorical criticism (itself over a generation old) and Lowth's study of patterns of repetition (in Hebrew "poetry", done in the 18th c.), and attempts to apply them in a revised form in connection with the narrative of Judith, she is curiously unaware of the fact that the many

“objective” symmetries which she proposes often (though not entirely) have much to do with how *she* redescribes the units based on *her* literary perceptions — and so these symmetries are not in any single sense the “compositional plan” of the author. Were this point recognized, we would be ready to take the first step towards the close reading that she aims at, and would not be left with a straight-forward prose redescription or accounting of the “architectural components” of the content. And, further, neither Muilenberg’s old work nor the comparatively newer studies in rhetoric are sufficiently exploited so as to give us an *interpretation* of the repetitive sequences, tensions, speaking styles, ironies, and so on, of the book — let alone such additionally intriguing literary dynamics in the Book of Judith as the complicated weave of eros and thanatos, deceit and truth, food and clothing, and the like. One may gladly admit that Craven has sifted and sorted and proposed intriguing balances and repetitions: but an interpreter must also take some risks, and this she does not do. Further, an interpreter must both recognize and deal with the relationship between one’s own time-based literary competence — i.e., what is “seen” and “understood” in the text — and the “truth” (literary, historical and religious) of the text. It is perhaps a bit naive for Craven to declare that her “compositional analysis . . . enables us . . . to sit with the author and to think his thoughts with him.”

The theme of literary competence is again the issue in the splendid new critical edition and translation of Judah Messer Leon’s *Nōpheth Šūphām* (NS) done by Isaac Rabinowitz. In this great work of rhetoric, first published in Mantua in 1475/6 as one of the first Hebrew incunabula (and republished by

Adolf Jellinek, that intrepid *Wissenschaftlicher*, in 1863) we have a “Renaissance man” (literally and figuratively) drawing from the old *ars rhetorica* of Aristotle, Cicero and Quintillian and demonstrating that not the work of the pagan ancients but, rather, Jewish Holy Scriptures is the true exemplar of rhetorical art. In so doing, Messer Leon reads Scripture with the literary competence of a Renaissance man trained in the classical *trivium* — believing and exemplifying the fact that this text is a perfect expression of ancient rhetorical principles. It may be noted that, in so doing, Messer Leon helped forge a new path and style of rhetoric.

In Messer Leon’s day, Jews of Renaissance Italy had access to two streams of philosophical tradition — each with its own attitude toward rhetoric. There was, on the one hand, the Arabic and Judeo-Arabic tradition, upon which Aristotle, in translation, had a great impact. By and large, this tradition considered rhetoric — as an art of argumentation and persuasion — to be “an offshoot of dialectic,” though of a weaker logical sort than true syllogistic proofs. On the other hand, there was the rich Latin legacy (particularly Ciceronian) then being revived by new discoveries. While these two traditions were never really synthesized, it was Messer Leon’s great merit to continue commenting on Aristotle *and* to integrate this task with Ciceronian humanism. The result was to take the biblical text seriously *as rhetoric*, and as an expression of the highest rank in the “kingdom of rhetoric.”

In this he does not follow the trend of Maimonides (or Averroes) for whom Scriptural language is *only* a body of rhetorical flourishes for the unphilosophical multitudes. To the contrary: for Messer Leon rhetoric is a high art and the Bible is the most worthy literature

from which to learn rhetorical principles. In fact, he especially encouraged the study of secular sciences like rhetoric in order to recapture a true and profound understanding of Holy Scriptures. Indeed, for him, all science and truth is inherent in Scripture: but this has become a lost treasure which must be found (i.e., rediscovered) via the secular sciences.

Following his Preface, Messer Leon divides his work into four "books":

Book I, in which are set forth: the definition and aim of Rhetoric; whether the art ought to be presented in written form; the definition and function of the oration; the kinds of Cause; the competencies of which the speaker should dispose, and the Parts of Invention.

Book II, which discusses how the parts of the discourse are handled in the three Kinds of Causes, to wit, Epeideictic, Judicial, Deliberative; cases involving injustice and wrong; and forensic issues of importance in public administration.

Book III describes patterns of human character, and the types of reasoning peculiar to the rhetorician.

Book IV discusses the Figures of Speech.

Each part is chock-full of sub-types which follow ancient rhetorical models and, being exemplified via Scripture, they result in truly remarkable interpretations of whole biblical passages (like Genesis 37 or

Psalms 45), as well as of stylistic figures and tropes. One might be tempted to see in this great work of Jewish Renaissance humanism — so elegantly translated and presented by Rabinowitz — one of the first Jewish literary studies of the Bible. The literary competence is, of course, thoroughly of the Renaissance — yet the modern reader, beside being confronted unexpectedly with his own competencies as he differs with Leon's stylistic estimations, will be surprised at just how enduring and illuminating are this venerable scholar's analyses and categories.

In sum, the work is a delight in every respect — a veritable "honeycomb's flow" — and brings a vital complement to the other (better known and more religious) forms of Medieval Renaissance Jewish Bible study. Messer Leon's work thus reopens a vital chapter in Bible study for all students of Scripture and rhetoric, and doubly challenges modern students of Scripture: to beware of imposing modern rhetorical competencies on biblical literature, and to begin the task of critically exploring the explicit and implicit rhetorical patterns used in ancient Israel as they came to complex literary expression in its Bible's various genres and strata.

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Duties and Rights

Human Rights in Jewish Law. By HAIM H. COHN. New York. KTAV Publishing Co., 1984. 266 pp.

Reviewed by MILTON R. KONVITZ

BEST-KNOWN ISRAELI jurist, Haim Cohn was born in Germany, in 1911, into the famous Carlebach rabbinical family. In 1930 he settled in Palestine where he studied at the Merkaz ha-Rav yeshivah in Jerusalem. He received a law

degree in Germany in 1933, and practiced law in Palestine. When Israel achieved independence, Cohn became state attorney, then Attorney General and, subsequently, Minister of Justice. In 1960 he was appointed a Justice of the Israel Supreme Court, and served with great distinction in that position until his retirement at the age of seventy in 1981. He made a substantial contribution to the establishment of Israel's legal and judicial systems and, in his many opinions as Justice of the Supreme Court, Cohn brought to bear his great knowledge of *halakhah* as well as of comparative secular law. He became known for his defense of civil liberties, often expressed in dissenting opinions and in public lectures in Europe, the United States, and Great Britain, and for four years was a member of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights. His monumental legal scholarship is reflected in his work as editor of the department of Criminal Law and Procedure in the *Encyclopedia Judaica*. In his book, *The Trial and Death of Jesus* (1971), Justice Cohn contended that the ultimate responsibility for the death of Jesus can in no way be laid at the hands of Jews.

Now, in *Human Rights in Jewish Law*, Justice Cohn has concentrated his vast erudition on a subject of transcendent significance to mankind, and particularly to the Jewish people. The task required precisely a scholar with the author's unique qualifications: a delicate sensitivity to situations that involve aspects of human rights, a sharp intelligence, courage to take positions without regard to whether or not they would please authorities or be consistent with public opinion, and a thorough knowledge of Jewish law as found in the Bible, the Babylonian Talmud, the Jerusalem Talmud, and the vast Responsa literature. One of the

specially commendable features of this work is the author's citation of the authorities for almost every proposition: the passages cited or quoted add up to some 1500 from the Bible, the Apocrypha and pseudepigraphical writings, the New Testament, Talmud, and Midrash, and then there are the countless references to Maimonides, Saadia Gaon, and scores of other halakhic authorities. In the future, no one working on the subject of human rights in Jewish law will be able to bypass Justice Cohn's book.

The work is comprised of twenty-six chapters of wide-ranging scope. Some of the rights treated relate to life, security of person, privacy, reputation, asylum, property, thought, speech, conscience, travel, and reputation. Justice Cohn also considers rights which, in the American legal order, are considered "entitlements" rather than constitutionally guaranteed rights, such as the "right" to work, to leisure, and to education. In the section on the rights of equality, Cohn considers discrimination on account of race, religion, birth, sex, alienage, and property. In the section on rights of justice, there are chapters on equality before the law, judicial standards, procedural safeguards, cruel punishments and torture, and legislative safeguards. Since the book treats of human rights in Jewish law, it does not discuss certain rights that are found in the United States Constitution but are missing from the standard halakhic sources, such as freedom of association, freedom of assembly, right of petition for redress of grievances, right to indictment by a grand jury, freedom from excessive bail, and the right to vote.

Justice Cohn makes it clear from the very beginning of his work that Jewish law is conceived in terms of duties rather than rights. Injunctions are either positive (*mizvot*)

‘asseh) or negative (*mizvot lo ta‘asseh*); one is either commanded to perform action or is commanded to refrain from a certain action. With very few exceptions, Jewish law “postulates a system of duties rather than a system of rights.” But the translation from duties to rights is not difficult, for one can

start from the premise that the purpose of imposing duties toward your fellowmen was but the recognition and implementation of rights of which these fellowmen stand possessed; or — and this comes to the same thing — the fulfillment of their legitimate expectations and legally recognized needs.

Indeed, in the last sentence of his “Conclusion,” Justice Cohn seems to assert a preference for duties over rights.

If “human rights” can be said to provide a basis or a starting point, or perhaps also the ultimate goal, of the normative process (he says), it is the duties, the do and the do-not, the care and respect for the other man, that make for true law.

Although the book is chiefly a scholarly treatise of human rights in Jewish law, an abridged encyclopedic, comprehensive treatment of a complex subject that spans millenia and continents, the author occasionally ventures to assert his own conclusion, to take his own halakhic position, as the culmination of a consideration of different, often conflicting, views. He sometimes also expresses the opinion that a certain authority was wrong in his interpretation of a text. For example, in considering the law relating to fugitive slaves, citing Maimonides, Cohn says: “This is an entirely unwarranted misreading

of the text [Deut. 23:15-16]”. Whether one will agree, or not, with the author’s observations or criticisms, they certainly add to the book’s interest. It should be noted, however, that his approach in the book is always from a stance internal to the halakhah, as though one rabbi were discussing a legal question with other rabbis. The reader would hardly ever suspect that the author is an outstanding scholar in secular comparative law. He does not consider or cite contemporary Israeli law, or American constitutional law, or any other body of secular law.

Nor does the book fall within the class of apologetic literature. Cohn states the halakhic propositions as he finds them. Some of them certainly fall short of the highest moral standards or best social policies as these have evolved, at least in theory if not always in practice, in Western society. On the whole, however, the record of Jewish law, as Justice Cohn’s book clearly manifests, demonstrates that it is one of the prime foundations of Western society’s legal and moral order. Inherent in Jewish law itself is a capacity for change to reflect deeper moral insights and newer social needs. It is, however, as Justice Cohn points out in his “Introduction,”

an open question whether it is only true modesty and humility, or rather a lack of courage, which lies at the root of the refusal of present-day authorities ever to pretend to greater wisdom and numbers as required for legislative changes.

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Herzl's Formative Years

Dori: The Life and Times of Theodor Herzl in Budapest (1860-1870). By ANDREW HANDLER. University, Ala. University of Alabama Press, 1983. 161 pp., \$16.95.

Reviewed by MONTY N. PENKOWER

MODERN POLITICAL Zionism, which may be defined as Zionism's entry into the international arena, begins with Theodor (Binyamin Ze'ev) Herzl. Rarely has the genesis of any world movement centered so decisively in the person of a single individual. Strengths and flaws were mixed in truly heroic proportion. He was a realist; a dreamer; given to outbursts of egoism and childish naiveté. He was ignorant about the masses of Jewry, particularly in Eastern Europe, and their generic past. Once the idea of the Jewish state fired his thought, he became so obsessed with it that he drove himself to death within nine years after determining to solve the "Jewish question" and, thereby, to change the course of world history. Especially impressive, this "prophet in a hurry," to borrow Walter Laqueur's phrase, succeeded during that brief period in elevating Zionism from its comatose state (where it would have been reduced to a narrow philanthropic, emotional cause) into a challenging international issue.

The origin of Herzl's engrossment is still a puzzle. Most scholars, following Alex Bein's superb biographical portrait, focus on the ominous swirl of anti-Semitism which Herzl encountered in Vienna and Paris. The writings of Duehring and Drumont; the rise of Christian Socialist Karl Lueger and evasive debates in the Austrian Reichstag regarding the status of Jews in that country; public agitation over the Panama Scandal and, especially, the Dreyfus Affair — all

had a profound influence on this aristocrat of the spirit. In a totally different vein, Carl Schorske has highlighted the influence of a "meta-liberal politics of fantasy," bred in the Vienna of Lueger and Schönerer, which favored a dynamic bestirring of the masses' innermost desire and will.

Dori: The Life and Times of Theodor Herzl in Budapest (1860-1878) now proposes that the hero's fledgling years are crucial to a full appreciation of his Zionist development. Andrew Handler's sure grasp of the Hungarian sources discloses that this young "Pest Jew," as Herzl later called himself, had more exposure to Judaism and less admiration for everything German than has been postulated in studies heretofore. More significant, "Dori" (a childhood nickname) could not have been oblivious to initial speeches in the Hungarian Diet against Jewish emancipation, one expressly in favor of "the restoration of the ancient Jewish state" for those refusing to embrace the Christian fold body and soul. Nor could Herzl, when later a law student at the University of Vienna, ignore the notorious Tieza-eslar blood libel, which anti-Semitic politicians would exploit in Hungary and throughout Europe.

This slim volume is certainly welcome for fleshing out Herzl's adolescence, yet the story recounted here actually deepens the mystery surrounding his dramatic conversion to Zionism. Elementary school courses in Hebrew and religion notwithstanding, Herzl seems (for financial reasons) to have been denied a Bar-Mitsva ceremony. Handler himself notes that Dori's skilled compositions in fluent Magyar and German are remarkable for the virtual absence of Jewish themes. Hungarian anti-Semitism also goes unmentioned in these and later literary efforts.

It took the despairing liberal

some time to return inwardly to his people, then embrace the cause of *Der Judenstaat*. Still, as some opponents quickly charged, this classic essay's bold projection of Zionism into global statecraft is distinguished by its palpable lack of Judaic spirit. The same holds true for the novel *Old-New Land*, Herzl's vision of the model commonwealth in Eretz Yisrael.

Herzl's contribution to the Zionist cause proved to be seminal, both in thought and deed. He and those of like mind correctly understood the first priority: regained sovereignty in the ancient Promised Land to rescue a downtrodden Jewry from the external danger of

anti-Semitism. But, once established, the legally secured commonwealth necessitated the preservation of Jewry's distinctive identity. Even a secularized Jewish state, as other ideologues have argued ever since the movement's inception, could never be "like all the nations." The content of the specific Jewish experience, its quality today both in Israel and in the Diaspora, still remains to be realized. This is at the heart of the unfinished Zionist revolution.

MONTY N. PENKOWER is chairman of the history department at Touro College.

HEBREW ANNUAL REVIEW

Editor: Reuben Ahroni

The Editor of the *Hebrew Annual Review* at the Ohio State University is pleased to announce that volume 8 of the *Hebrew Annual Review*:

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A Prayer in Context

HERMAN L. HOROWITZ

I cry out against the rain, but who can survive without it?
I shake my fist at the burning rays of the sun, but who can prevail without it?
I hate the limitations of the law, but who can live outside it?
I chafe at the demands made on me by community, but can I live separated from it?
I fulminate against limits to my freedom, but what freedom can survive without limits?
I resent my mother's pressures, but who can do without her?
I hate the discipline of my father, but can I do without him?
I rebel against the home that stifled me, but could I have survived without it?
I disdain the call of my religion to be responsible, but how can I amount to anything without responsibility?
I rage at the uncomfortable feelings of my conscience, but who can be human without it?
I rebel against the limitations of Shabbat, but what do I turn into without it?
I rage at the pressures of custom, but who can steer through life without it?
I ignore the wisdom of my past, but who can flourish without it?
I curse you for your hiddenness and your silence, Lord, but what can I be without you? Please take me back.

HERMAN L. HOROWITZ is rabbi of Beth Emeth Congregation, Philadelphia, as well as a marriage and family therapist.

BOOKS RECEIVED

Feb. 15, 1985 through April 30, 1985

Listing of a book does not preclude its being reviewed in a subsequent issue of JUDAISM

American Jewish Life

Neusner, Jacob. *Stranger at Home: The Holocaust, Zionism and American Judaism*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1985. ix + 213 pp., \$8.95 (paper).

Rosenberg, Stuart E. *The New Jewish Identity in America*. New York: Hippocrene Books Inc., 1985. xiv + 290 pp., \$19.95.

Tarshish, Allan. *Dawn in the West*, ed. Sefton D. Temkin. Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1985. xiv + 303 pp., \$14.00 (paper).

Sklare, Marshall. *Conservative Judaism*. Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1985. 330 pp., \$12.75 (paper).

Sorin, Gerald. *The Prophetic Minority*. American Jewish Immigrant Radicals, 1880-1920. Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1985. x + 211 pp., \$24.95.

Autobiography and Biography.

de Rothschild, Guy. *The Whims of Fortune*. New York: Random House, 1985. 337 pp., \$19.95.

Jakobovits, Immanuel. *If Only My People — Zionism in my Life*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson Ltd., 1985. xiii + 280 pp., £15.

Reinharz, Jehuda. *Chaim Weizman*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985. x + 566 pp., \$29.95.

Trupin, Sophie. *Dakota Diaspora*. Memoirs of a Jewish Homesteader. Berkeley, Cal.: Alternative Press, 1985. 160 pp., \$7.95 (paper).

Christianity and Jewish/Christian Relations

Daum, Annette and Eugene Fisher. *The Challenge of Shalom for Catholics and Jews*. New York: UAHF, NCCB, 1985. 97 pp.

Roberts, Bernadette. *The Path to No-Self*. Life at the Center. Boston: Shambala, 1985. x + 214 pp., \$9.95 (paper).

Sanders, E.P. *Jesus and Judaism*. Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press, 1985. 448 pp., \$19.95.

Schiffman, Laurence H. *Who Was a Jew?* Rabbinic and Halakhic Perspectives on the Jewish-Christian Schism. Hoboken, N.J.: KTAV, 1985. xii + 131 pp., \$14.95.

Werner, Eric. *The Sacred Bridge*, vol. II. Hoboken, N.J.: KTAV, 1985. xviii + 271 pp., \$29.50.

Church/State

Pfeffer, Leo. *Religion, State and the Burger Court*. Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1985. xiv + 310 pp., \$22.95.

European Jewry

Blum, Jakub and Vera Rich. *The Image of the Jew in Soviet Literature*. The Post-Stalin Period. New York: KTAV, 1985. 276 pp., \$25.00.

Hundert, G. D. and G. C. Bacon. *The Jews in Poland and Russia*. Bibliographical Essays. Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana Univ. Press., 1984. 276 pp., \$25.00.

Fiction

Asch, Sholem. *The Apostle*. New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers. Inc., 1985. 754 pp., \$10.95 (paper).

Dass, Ram and Paul Gorman. *How Can I Help?* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985. 243 pp., \$5.95 (paper).

Epstein, Leslie. *Goldkorn Tales*. New York: E. P. Dutton, Inc., 1985. 244 pp., \$16.95.

Florence, Ronald. *The Gypsy Man*. New York: Villard Books, 1985. 326 pp., \$16.95.

Levi, Primo. *If Not Now, When?* New York: Summit Books, 1985. 349 pp., \$15.95.

Lipshitz, Arye, tr. by Misha Lourish. *We Built Jerusalem*. Tales of Pioneering Days. New York: Cornwall Books, 1984. 175 pp., \$14.95.

Rabon, Israel, tr. by Leonard Wolf. *The Street*. New York: Schocken Books, 1985. 192 pp. \$14.95.

Wouk, Herman. *Inside, Outside*. Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1985. 644 pp., \$19.95.

Yehoshua, A. B. *A Late Divorce*. New York: E. P. Dutton, Inc., 1985. 354 pp., \$9.95 (paper).

Yehoshua, A. B. *The Lover*. New York: E. P. Dutton, Inc., 1985. 352 pp., \$9.95 (paper).

History

Karp, Abraham J. *Haven and Home*. History of the Jews in America. New York: Schocken Books, 1985. xiii + 401 pp., \$24.95.

Norman, Theodore. *An Outstretched Arm*. History of the Jewish Colonization Association. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985. xvi + 326 pp. \$32.00.

Holocaust

Abzug, Robert H. *Inside the Vicious Heart*. Americans and the Liberation of Nazi Concentration Camps. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985. xiii + 192 pp., \$16.95.

- Karas, Joza. *Music in Terezin. 1941-1945*. New York: Beaufort Books, Inc., 1985. xxvii + 223 pp., \$16.95.
- Littell, Marcia Sachs, ed. *Holocaust Education*. New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1985. 112 pp., \$19.95.
- Rosenfeld, Alvin. *Imagining Hitler*. Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana Univ. Press, 1985. xx + 121 pp., \$15.00.
- Vegh, Claudine. *I Didn't Say Goodbye*. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1985. 179 pp., \$14.95.

Israel

- Aharoni, Dov. *General Sharon's War Against Time Magazine*. New York: Steimatzky, 1985. 336 pp., \$4.95 (paper).
- Deacon, Richard. *The Israeli Secret Service*. New York: Taplinger Pub. Co., 1985. 318 pp., \$3.95 (paper).
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- Krausz, Ernest, ed. *Politics and Society in Israel*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1985. x + 457 pp., \$9.95 (paper).
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- Spiegel, Steven L. *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict*. Making America's Middle East Policy, from Truman to Reagan. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1985. xvi + 522 pp., \$24.95.
- Teveth, Shabtai. *Ben-Gurion and the Palestinian Arabs*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1985. x + 234 pp., \$17.95.

Judaism

- Belin, David. *Why Choose Judaism: New Dimensions of Jewish Outreach*. New York: UAHF, 1985. 28 pp., \$4.00 (paper).
- Kipper, Lenore C. and Howard I. Bogot. *The Alef-Bet of Jewish Values*. Code Words of Jewish Life. New York: UAHF, 1985. 44 pp., \$6.00 (paper).
- Neusner, Jacob. *Judaism. The Evidence of the Mishnah*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1985. xix + 419 pp., \$15.95 (paper).
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- Schwartz, Richard H. *Judaism and Global Survival*. New York: Vantage Press, 1985. xvi + 179 pp., \$7.95 (paper).
- Shapolsky, Ian. *The Jewish Trivia and Information Book*. New York: Steimatzky, 1984. 400 pp., \$4.95 (paper).
- Strassfeld, Michael. *The Jewish Holidays. A Guide and Commentary*. New York: Harper & Row, 1985. 248 pp., \$24.95.

Juvenile

Strauss, Ruby G. with Ahuva Schuller and Lillian W. Adler. *The Hebrew Primer*. New York: Behrman House, Inc., 1985. 128 pp., \$2.95 (paper).

Law and Social Justice

Downs, Donald Alexander. *Nazis in Skokie*. Freedom, Community and the First Amendment. Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame Press, 1985. xii + 227 pp., \$20.00.

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Benny, Donald L. *Mutuality*. The Vision of Martin Buber. Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1985. xiii + 121 pp., \$29.50.

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Simon, H. and M. Simon. *Geschichte der jüdischen Philosophie*. Munich: C. H. Beck, 1984. 233 pp., DM 28.

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Talmud

Neusner, Jacob. *Our Sages, God and Israel*. An Anthology of the Talmud of the Land of Israel. Chappaqua, N.Y.: Rossel Books, 1985. xxix + 181 pp., \$19.95.

Sukkot

ADAM D. FISHER

Cleansed by white Yom Kippur light
we watch a yellow moon,
pregnant round
through the Sukkah roof
of pungent pine;
a harvest chuppah
for God
for us.

ADAM D. FISHER is rabbi of Temple Isaiah, Stony Brook, N.Y.

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AUTHOR'S QUERY

For a biography of Leo Pfeffer, distinguished attorney and scholar, I would appreciate hearing from his colleagues, friends and former students who might like to share with me their correspondence, photographs and other memorabilia

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